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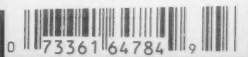
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G THE REALITY

A decade has passed since legislation opened the doors to casino gambling on Indian reservations. It was intended to strengthen tribal government, encourage tribal economic development and increase tribal self-sufficiency.

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- › Bradenton (Fla.) Herald

- › Grand Forks (N.D.) Herald
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- › The Monterey County (Calif.) Herald
- › (State College, Pa.) Centre Daily Times
- › Aberdeen (S.D.) American News
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publisher's note

Of Clinton, the Constitution & the Press

by Joan Konner



Carter



Abrams



Schlesinger



Drinan



Neuborne



Garment

The least we can do about the White House scandal — specifically, the press coverage of it — is to learn something from it. That's precisely what we tried to do at the annual *Columbia Journalism Review* forum, funded by AT&T, on "How the Press Is Shaping (or Misshaping) Politics." For a fresh perspective, we put together a panel made up primarily not of journalists but long-view scholars who have observed, studied, and written about the relationship between the press and politics. The feisty panel was moderated by lawyer Floyd Abrams, the William J. Brennan Jr. Visiting Professor of First Amendment Issues at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. The forum was aptly timed, taking place in New York City on December 16, the night before the House debate on President Clinton's impeachment was set to begin. Excerpts from the panel:

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., historian: "Why should the press, which was the champion of the reality principle at the time of Watergate, become the promoter of the kind of obsession with the Monica Lewinsky affair at the expense of all the other problems of the Republic? I wonder whether this isn't associated with a change in the structure, a competitive structure, of the press. It's reminiscent perhaps of the 1890s, the beginnings of yellow journalism. Everyone is trying to scoop everyone else, and therefore the accountability and the responsibility of the press becomes an immediate casualty."

Father Robert Drinan, priest, Georgetown law professor, and former Democratic congressman: "In the Constitution, the framers put this sentence: 'No religious tests should ever be required for a public official.' They [the House Republicans] are asking a religious test. That bodes evil for non-believers. A [Republican] member of the House Judiciary Committee called me the other day. He said that 35 percent of his constituents are Christian Coalition radical right and that 'they [the Coalition] would defeat me if I voted against impeachment.' So we have this radical element out there that are in essence saying: 'We are requiring a religious test of all the incumbents.'"

Steven Carter, Yale law professor: "I find the claim that the press is out of touch with the American people neither new nor particularly interesting. In fact, it strikes me that being out of touch is part of the job of the press. The press, being vested with the First Amendment freedom, is invested with a certain

responsibility — not to give the American people what they want. The Constitution is useful only if the press is going to set itself up to give people what they need rather than what they want. Which means the exercise of editorial judgment."

Suzanne Garment, former *Wall Street Journal* columnist and now resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.: "Even if journalists try to exercise news judgment, they do so within the framework of ideas that's formed well beyond the boundaries of any newsroom. The causes [of this scandal] lie way back in the cold war and the internal divisions in this country that it fermented, in the culture wars that resulted during the Vietnam era, in Bill Clinton's role in those days, and in the enemies that he and people like him acquired. And in the determination of those enemies to see to it that he was brought to account sooner or later over something. Those are currents of thought in which journalists participate."

Burt Neuborne, New York University law professor: "The press has been subsumed into a market psychology, because they are now owned by large conglomerates, of which they are simply a piece. And they [news organizations] are expected to contribute their piece of the profit to the larger pie. You don't have people controlling the press anymore with a fervent sense of responsibility to the First Amendment. Concentrating on who's sleeping with whom, on sensationalism, is concentrating on essentially irrelevant issues. Nobody is thinking about the 30 percent of the population that is left out of the American dream."

Equally important were Floyd Abrams's opening comments: "I believe the media, all of it considered together, has been complicit, often instrumental, in leading to the impeachment. I refer not to one story or another. Or one error or another. My point is more basic. It relates to the definition of news itself. Once the press, all of it, treated the question of whether the president had sex with Monica Lewinsky and then sought to cover it up as an extraordinarily serious topic, a topic truly worthy of repeated coverage, the die was cast. The risk of impeachment immediately became all the realer once that definition of the story was chosen. The press made a sort of collective judgment that the topic was not only newsworthy but earthshaking. I fault the press for a collective lack of judgment and sense of proportion."

The rest is history. ♦

letters



MISSING MILESTONE

People who need *People* are the luckiest people in the world? Not, I'm afraid, according to the history of twentieth century journal-

ism by Harold Evans and the timeline that accompanied the article ("What a Century!" CJR, January/February). There is no mention of the launch in 1974 of *People* (although the births of *Business Week*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, *Ebony*, *TV Guide*, *Ms.*, *Playboy*, and even *USA Today* are noted, among others). It's a strange omission, considering the fact that *People* is the most financially successful magazine in the history of magazine publishing. But mere money aside, *People* has had an enormous impact on contemporary journalism. It is generally credited with introducing "personality journalism" and making the balanced scrutiny of the private character and behavior of public figures a legitimate part of modern journalism. My interest in seeing justice done to *People* is not only historical; it is also natal. I oversaw its birth as the founding managing editor, a job I held until 1982.

RICHARD B. STOLLEY
Senior editorial adviser
Time, Inc.
New York, New York

FAR FROM OK

Editors' note: "The Worst Newspaper in America," Bruce Selcraig's critique of *The Daily Oklahoman* (CJR, January/February), generated more mail from readers than any article in the magazine's memory. Overwhelmingly the message was one of gratitude — in 127 letters out of a total of 156 so far. Some typical comments: "Thanks for exposing our local humiliation"; "Your article was painful, but we thought it was great"; "If anything, you were too easy on them"; "Never have I read an article that was more true"; "Thanks for a very carefully researched and accurately

presented treatment of the journalistic void that afflicts Oklahoma City"; "Thanks for saying out loud what we've been saying in private for years"; "I've worked on quality metros and have edited several small town papers on my own, and I can tell you firsthand — the *Daily Oklahoman* gives journalism a bad name."

Negative responses — 29 in all — were equally consistent: "Typical liberal hypocrisy"; "The worst newspaper in America is the left-wing *New York Times*. Selcraig is a typical left-winger with a double standard"; "It's too bad the Soviet Union is no more. The KGB definitely could have used Selcraig's talents. Come to think of it, there's more Marxists at CJR than there probably ever were in Moscow."

Excerpts from a few representative letters follow.

Thank you, CJR, for outing *The Daily Oklahoman*. Now you know why I and thousands of others in Oklahoma upchuck our breakfast every single day after reading our "state" newspaper. Your article was absolutely on target. Many, like me, feel disenfranchised, but we still vote and we cling to the hope that some day objectivity and intellectual honesty will return to our state.

Thanks also for acknowledging our little jewel of a biweekly, *The Oklahoma Observer*, read by far too few people.

BILLYE VAN SCHUYVER
Chickasha, Oklahoma

I applaud your article about *The Daily Oklahoman*. I've lived in many cities around the country and have never read a more pathetic newspaper. Its effect on the civic life in this city is seriously negative; it makes people politically and culturally stupid. It makes for a very negative first impression on visitors. In others and my experience, overcoming this first impression is difficult when trying to recruit professionals to local universities and businesses.

BOB BARSTEAD
Edmond, Oklahoma

I am one of the fortunate ones who travel for a living and get the opportunity to

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read "real" newspapers. Oklahoma has traveled away from its strong Democratic roots to the meanness of right-winged conservatism not because the good people chose to, but because they have been force-fed one-sided rage disguised as responsible journalism.

DAN T. COLLIER
Edmond, Oklahoma

I'm just one more embarrassed and angry Oklahoman here to thank you a thousand times for your well-articulated criticism. Every couple of months, a well-scrubbed, likely very innocent and well-meaning individual trying to earn a buck gently raps on my door and tries to sell me a subscription to *The Daily Oklahoman*. I tend to encourage them to find somewhat less demeaning work — perhaps in garbage collecting or fast food.

J.A. BONNER
Edmond, Oklahoma

Selcraig's article is a textbook example of biased and unbalanced reporting. It is no secret that *The Daily Oklahoman* has a conservative editorial page. So Selcraig zeros in on liberals to provide a large dose of criticism of the newspaper. Where's the other side of the story?

It is obvious that he did not seriously research coverage of the Federal Building bombing or interview the editors and reporters who produced it despite the devastating loss of family members and friends. They do not need a Pulitzer Prize to tell them they did a good job.

Selcraig suggests that the newspaper is reluctant to hire minorities. That is not the case. The problem is a lack of minority applicants, which managing editor Ed Kelley has attempted to remedy. He has recruited frontline editors and reporters to serve as mentors to minority high school and college students.

All newspapers have room to grow, and so does *Oklahoman*. But this story raises more questions about the integrity of the author and CJR than it does about an award-winning newspaper in the heartland of America.

SUE HALE
Former assistant managing editor
The Daily Oklahoman
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

In "Going More Local in Miami," CJR, January/February, you note that during

the tenure of publisher David Lawrence *The Miami Herald* narrowed news coverage to nine key subject areas. Not true on two counts. First, the nine subject areas were themselves quite broad (crime, education, weather and environment, local government, Latin America and the Caribbean, health, sports, and consumer issues). Second, the intent and practice was never to limit coverage of other subjects; it was to expand coverage of the nine.

DOUGLAS C. CLIFTON
Executive editor
The Miami Herald
Miami, Florida

GETTING THE LEAD OUT

In the January/February issue, a CJR Dart criticized *Consumer Reports* [for charging \$35 for a water-lead test at an outside laboratory that was available for \$17 to those who contacted the lab directly]. Lead in water is a proven health risk. The market test was part of our mission to test, inform, and protect. We did indeed charge a higher price for our service than the University of North Carolina does, because we gave added value. The product conveniences included credit-card billing, seven-day-a-week toll-free ordering and customer service, and shipping, mailing, and handling included in the cost of the order. Our service also provided

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ed important, additional features including easy-to-follow instructions, easy-to-understand test results, and a three-color *Consumer Reports Guide to Clean Water*, which included *Consumer Reports* ratings of five different types (twenty-nine models) of water filters. Our technical staff in Yonkers, New York, checked the results of the tests on an ongoing basis to ensure quality.

MARC S. KAPLAN

Director, Office of Public Information
Consumers Union
Yonkers, New York

TALK ABOUT TYPOS!

I am quoted incorrectly in the CJR poll story in your January/February issue. My response to the poll question was not that appearances on television or radio by reporters raise the *profits* of a news organization, but that they raise the *profile*. In fact, the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* receives no compensation when its staff appears on television or radio.

JOHN TEMPLE

Editor, *Rocky Mountain News*
Denver, Colorado

TAKING ISSUE

Your Dart about my Allentown, Pennsylvania, *Morning Call* workshop (CJR, November/December) is unfair and inaccurate in virtually every respect. [The Dart was aimed at DeSilva's "incredible lapse in judgment" in showing up at the reporting and editing workshop — much to the consternation of staffers at the *Call* — with "a mystery guest in tow": Patricia Smith, "the over-imaginative columnist who had recently left *The Boston Globe* in disgrace."]

When you say I came with Patricia "in tow" you imply I intended her to be at the workshop. This is not so. I had not expected her to come. Patricia showed up in Allentown because she needed the company of a friend who had not abandoned her. Leaving her alone all day in an unfamiliar city was not an option. That left two alternatives: accepting her presence or canceling the workshop at the very last minute.

When you call Patricia a "mystery guest" you imply that I tried to conceal her identity. Before the workshop started, I informed the managing editor she was there. And as the workshop began in the morning, I told the participants who she was.

When you say I held Patricia's work up as "a model" you imply that I condoned her fictionalizing. What happened is that when a question came up about how a minority writer's voice might be different from the white male voices that dominate most news pages, I asked Patricia to respond. Why would I do that? For most of the day, she was the only minority in the room.

In all, Patricia spoke for no more than a couple of minutes in a workshop day that lasted seven hours.

The real meaning behind the Dart would seem to be the belief that Patricia Smith is a pariah with no right to be at a professional gathering. The Dart smacks of ugly things, including guilt by association and a vindictiveness that cannot be satisfied with the destruction of Patricia Smith. Now we must also destroy her friends.

BRUCE DESILVA

Enterprise editor, The Associated Press
Ridgefield, Connecticut

WAY TO GO

It's reassuring to see that all of the Web sites mentioned in John Pavlik's article ("Finally, a Peek at Profits," CJR, November/December) are producing original content in addition to comprehensive repackaging of the parent organization's news. Too many publishers are so driven by the short-term bottom line that they fail to see the bleak future that awaits newspapers and TV stations that do not establish themselves as the online news leaders in their markets. Pavlik's compilation of smart approaches should give those publishers food for thought.

BEAU DURE

Falls Church, Virginia

CORRECTIONS

An article on Internet discussion lists of special interest to journalists ("The Digital Watercooler Gets Hot," CJR, January/February) included an incorrect e-mail address for FOI-L. The correct address is listserv@listserv.syr.edu.

A number of errors crept into the Media Timeline in the January/February cover story. Corrected dates are: *The Today Show* premiered in 1952. Castro seized power in 1959. Seymour Hersh reported My Lai in 1969. Burglars broke into the Watergate, and Woodward and Bernstein broke the story, in 1972.

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CJRupfront

NEWSPAPERS

THE *OTHER* BOOK REVIEW L.A.'s Challenge to The New York Times

In the two years that Steve Wasserman has edited the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* he's tried to give the section, which he says "simply wasn't seen in the citadels of publishing," not just visibility but buzz. Having author Ray Bradbury savage the section as "flimsy" last April was not what he had in mind.

Bradbury's unexpected blindness — it came during a ceremony honoring him at the *Times* — put the section on the map all right. In the aftermath, the online magazine *Salon* turned its gimlet eye on Wasserman, then fifteen months into the job, and his effort to give the *Book Review* new life. *Salon's* writer couldn't decide whether Wasserman's campaign to remake the *Review* "in his imperious image" was good for the section or not. But he quoted lots of (anonymous) book industry types who called the forty-six-year-old editor everything from an "egomaniac" to a "vindictive bastard." Ouch.

Eight months after the dustup, on New Year's Eve, Bradbury phoned Wasserman's secretary with an updated, end-of-the-year assessment: "You're doing a splendid job."

The conversion of the section's most public critic made it official: Steve Wasserman is surely changing the way the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* is perceived. Members of a kind of *L.A. Times Book Review* Fan Club — including such



Los Angeles Times Book Review editor Steve Wasserman

writers as Joan Didion, Gore Vidal, and Anthony Lewis — contend that the *Review* has gone from cultural no-show to cultural contender, that it has become a real alternative to the regal *New York Times Book Review* and the highbrow *New York Review of Books*. "The book review is just goddam great," Pete Hamill



wrote Wasserman last July in a note that Wasserman happily shares. "Week after week, month after month, it's bright, intelligent, and surprising. Keep doing the work of the Lord."

Not everyone agrees. Rick Barrs, editor of the alternative weekly *New Times L.A.*, for example, calls the section "relentlessly pointy-headed" and argues that it is edited with an eye toward Manhattan rather than Malibu. There is no denying that the *Review* is more serious, some might say scholarly, under Wasserman. Contributors include heavyweights like Saul Bellow and Eric Hobsbawm, and the issues are often centered on a single theme like "The Good Earth" or "Business and the American Mind." The reviews are typically long, ruminative essays.

Carlin Romano, literary critic of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and former president of the National Book Critics Circle, says that while it remains politically neutral, Wasserman's section avoids the excruciating on-the-one-hand and on-the-other trap that *The New York Times Book Review* can fall into. "It's fairly unusual to have so many trenchant, thoughtful reviews," Romano says. "I don't know how many other book editors

have that aim, to stir people to argument." Romano also praises the section's matching of books with reviewers, citing pairings such as Stephen Toulmin on Isaiah Berlin, Christopher Hitchens on Jessica Mitford, and Paul Fussell on Robert Graves.

That Wasserman has the audacity to take on the 102-year-old *New York Times Book Review* is a measure of his ambition. "The *New York Times Book Review* is, by virtue of geography, ambition, and achievement, the pre-eminent book review in the country," he says. "But there certainly is room enough in a country of 270 million people, for at least several other book reviews." Many writers, who know that just a fraction of the 68,000 books published this year will get reviewed in any major book review, welcome the alternative forum. "The *New York Times* has such an incredible ability to make or break a book," says an award-winning nonfiction writer. "The idea of creating a new center of opinion that adds to the possibility that a book will get a hearing is good."

New centers of opinion, however, don't necessarily pay the bills. One question yet to be answered is just how Wasserman's *Review* fits into the new bottom-line *Los Angeles Times*. At *L.A. Weekly*, where *Times*-bashing is a sport, staff members

see Wasserman zigging as the rest of the *Times* zags. "I think that as the *L.A. Times* in general grows more trivial, the book review is becoming a respectable, intellectual organ," says Ella Taylor, a film critic and former editor of the *L.A. Weekly Literary Supplement*.

Within the *Times* itself, publisher Mark Willes has many fans, but it is also not hard to find staffers who'll tell you that the newspaper's content has been dumbed down to further his goal of increased circulation. They tell a tale of the decline and fall of America's second-largest metro daily. Yet it's difficult to figure out just how Wasserman — his section growing more intellectual and bleeding money — fits the story line.

Wasserman concedes that his *Review* hasn't brought in enough new advertising to make money, despite a 40 percent ad rate cut. (He won't say how much his section loses, though he freely speculates that the *New York Times Book Review* "loses millions.") Wasserman has inserted himself quite aggressively into the *Review*'s marketing and advertising efforts. In 1997, he offered to pay \$1,000 to the salesperson who sold the next \$200,000 corporate sponsorship for the paper's annual Festival of Books. Now he is encouraging the advertising

department to hit up businesses that might not traditionally advertise in the section. And he supplies a sales pitch: "The readers of the *L.A. Times Book Review* are among this newspaper's most prosperous and best-educated readers."

His willingness to work with the business department is buying favor — and perhaps time — with senior management. "Steve's on board," says *Times* editor Michael Parks. "He works particularly well with the general manager on the business side who's been working at increasing the advertising and visibility and readership of the *Book Review*. There's a very good partnership."

Wasserman's outspokenness — he has been quoted in the *Times*'s own pages saying, "Anything that alters the lethargy that this paper and this industry have long suffered from is good" — has alienated some colleagues in the newsroom. "He's very braggadocio and brash," says one *Times* reporter. "He's definitely not universally loved and admired, and has only a small network of support in the newsroom."

But as long as Wasserman's network includes Willes and Parks — and Parks insists that it does — it is plenty big.

— James B. Kelleher

Kelleher is a West Coast business reporter.

NEWSPAPERS

SUNDAY, BLOODY SUNDAY

A New Turn in the Tab Wars



New York Daily News editor Debby Krenek

Ah, the rich urban opera of New York City's tabloids. Consider some sepia snapshots from the album:

Here's that old apocalyptic strike at the *Daily News*; there's Abe Hirschfeld, the occasionally coherent former owner of the *New York Post*, planting a kiss on the winning mug of editor and local legend Pete Hamill. Here's debt-ridden *News* owner Robert Maxwell plunging to his death from his yacht; there's would-be *Post* owner, Steve Hoffenberg, heading to jail for fraud. Here comes Hamill again, this time to edit the *News*; there he goes, eight months later. The daily scuffle of the *News* and the *Post* can't be matched outside of London.

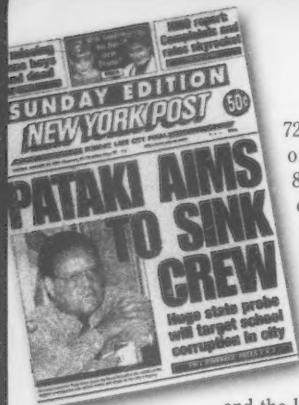
And now, as a somewhat battered



Edward Kosner, the *News*'s Sunday editor

News picks itself up and goes on the offensive, the battle is intensifying. For example, the *News* is boosting its business coverage, it is making over page 2 into a what-to-do list, and, most importantly, it is fighting back against a frontal assault on its Sunday edition.

The *News*'s circulation dwarfs the *Post*'s,



723,143 vs. 437,467 on weekdays, 810,295 vs. 382,382 on Sundays. But until April of 1996, the *Post* didn't even have a Sunday paper — save for short-lived versions in 1978

and the late eighties. And not long ago, in September 1995, the *News's* Sunday circulation was nearly a million.

One wouldn't expect false modesty from the *Post*. Which is good, because one won't get any. "We started a Sunday paper from nothing two years and a couple of months ago," says Marc Kalech, who's responsible for Sunday's paper as the *Post's* managing editor. "It's got to be one of the most successful stories in American journalism."

The *Post*, thanks to its willingness to be outrageous (it front-paged the phony story of Clinton's "son" via a black prostitute), its plugged-in gossip pages, and its lively (and media-industry heavy) business section, outstrips the *News* in the crucial intangible of buzz. One tabloid vet calls this a "Twinkies" strategy. The city's elite, for whom the main-course reads are *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, choose the tasty trifle of the *Post* as a second read because of its sass and sizzle — to say nothing of its obsession with celebrities. "The *Post's* Twinkies are better than the *News's*," says the vet.

A representative of a major ad-buying agency, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the firm's data show that the *Post*, though its circulation is lower than the *News*, has a higher percentage of readers who make \$100,000 or more.

Still, the *Post* is surely losing a lot of money. Lou Colasuonno, former news editor at the *Post* and (briefly) editor at the *News*, estimates that the *Post* loses between \$15 million and \$20 million a year for Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. In September 1997, former *New York* magazine media columnist Elizabeth Lesly, after combing through detailed Australian financial disclosure documents, reported that the *Post* lost \$34 million in fiscal 1996 and \$21 million in 1995. The *Post* will not discuss finances.

Nor will the *News*. But it is widely perceived to be marginally profitable — Lesly reported *News* earnings in excess of \$10 million were expected in 1997, on revenues of about \$380 million.

Murdoch appears willing to underwrite *Post* losses, perhaps for the political bully pulpit it affords him, but *News* owner Mort Zuckerman's public comments testify that he can't, or won't, play Murdoch's money-losing game.

Murdoch's deep pockets are not the only challenge facing the *News*. For one thing, a much-heralded plan to get color into its pages was shelved in March 1998, after serious distribution glitches. The *News* says it has solved the problems and expects color by fall.

Then there is pricing. On Sunday, the *Post* sells for only 50 cents (yes, it is noticeably thinner than the *News*). The *News* costs \$1.00, down from \$1.50 when the *Post's* Sunday edition launched. Weekdays both papers are 50 cents in Manhattan, but the *Post* goes for 35 cents in the outer boroughs.

More significant, the *News* has something of an identity problem. It was all built on the directive "Tell it to Sweeney" — an emblematic white, blue-collar everyman. But Sweeney today is harder to find; the city is an economic and ethnic polyglot.

The new strategy at the *News* is a curious blend of reaching out to its blue-collar core and competing with the *Post* for Manhattan's elite. For example, a revamped business section, renamed BizNews, boasts new columns, additional pages, and new hires. Scott Wenger, the new business editor, concedes that the section requires a balancing act. "We look for two different kinds of audiences," he says. "One of them is the mainstay of our readership, the 723,000 who plunk down money to buy our paper every day." The other? "The city's business movers and shakers. We want to be one of their reads every day."

But *Daily News* editor Debby Krenak says the elite are not a central focus: "A newspaper has to target a lot of different audiences, but our main thrust will always be the working-class New Yorker." In the next couple of months, Krenak says, the paper plans to increase coverage of the city's four outer boroughs. She points to a new Tom Robbins column, "Working Papers," which will cover not just unions but working lives and issues. As for the immigrants that make up so much of New York's population, she says, "What we seem to find is that no matter what group people are from it's the same kinds of news they want — education, crime in the neighborhoods, health, that kind of thing." Watch too, she says, for more investiga-

tive pieces and a phased-in redesign to give the tab "more pop."

That's Monday through Saturday, at least. On Sundays, Krenak says, "I don't know exactly how it will evolve." Since January, the *Sunday News* has had a separate editor who reports not to Krenak but to editorial director Harold Evans.

Sunday is payday for newspapers. *News* owner Zuckerman has said that Sundays account for more than a third of his ad revenues. In recent months the *Post's* Sunday focus has been clear — mostly Manhattan and personalities. The *News* has zeroed in on the other boroughs and on service. It has greater depth, but has sometimes been plodding.

Nor comes a Sunday makeover — as the *Sunday Daily News* — under the stewardship of Edward Kosner, a longtime heavy-weight magazine editor. The revamped Sunday paper will appear in March.

Kosner got his start at — ah, irony — the *New York Post* in 1958. He went on to edit *Newsweek*, then *New York*, and (this one less successfully) *Esquire* from 1993 to 1997. "What I'm trying to do is reformulate the paper," says Kosner. Plans are afoot for two pull-out sections ("magazines," Kosner calls them), one for entertainment and one for service — "money, computers, health, relationships, what-to-buy," Kosner says, "the service syllabus."

He also plans a new commentary section, to be edited by Michael Kramer, most recently the editor of *Brill's Content*. Other Sunday hires include Russ Hoyle, former editor of *The Hartford Advocate*, and writers David Noonan and David Lefer.

Post partisans, predictably, scoff at the notion of a veteran magazine editor piloting a quintessential New York tabloid, even one day a week. "Recipe for disaster," says Bill Hoffmann, a senior writer who's been at the *Post* for fifteen years.

Kosner, amused, retorts, "I was writing the wood" — the front-page headline — "at the *Post* when Hoffmann was playing with his G.I. Joes."

— Jon Fine
Fine is a Brooklyn-based journalist.



PRESS CREDENTIALS, \$298

The Freebies Issue Takes a New Twist

Want to see the world for free? Buy yourself a press pass. A Baltimore-based newsletter publisher is selling credentials that it says people can use to travel for free — just like those experienced travel writers who pay little or nothing for their trips.

For \$298, Agora Publishing offers a pass "valid for twelve months," part of an "International Correspondent's Kit" that also includes assignment letters from Agora publications, which the company will provide "even if you've never written a word or snapped a photo in your life." For just \$200 more — "Best Deal!" — buyers get a twenty-four-month pass with which to enjoy free travel and hotel rooms — just like those professionals.

The offer comes in an eight-page direct mail ad sent to subscribers of an Agora newsletter called *Island Properties Report*, one of more than forty newsletters the company publishes. "I need information to feed my worldwide publishing business," company president Bill Bonner explains in the mailing. "That means eyes and ears in a hundred different places." Can't write well? Can't take good photos? "No problem," Bonner exudes.

Actual professional travel writers take a dim view of this, naturally. Cynthia Boul Janssens, immediate past president of the American Society of Travel Writers, scoffs at the offer. Even with an assignment letter, a "press pass" will not bring free travel to non-writers, she says, "because the people who give [free travel] don't give it to people who don't produce articles."

Jennifer Murawski, group publisher of Agora Travel Publishing, says a revised version of the marketing letter makes it clearer that people who take free trips have "certain obligations," she says, adding that Agora's own

newsletters are potential outlets for articles written by holders of Agora press passes. "We certainly aren't suggesting that people could simply portray themselves as a free-lance writer, wangle a trip, and then never write anything about it," she says. The kit does include free-lancing instructions, such as "eight steps to writing a professional query letter." It also tells of a wonderful world of travel writing that includes meals and hotels, hobnobbing with celebrities and diplomats, and "pampering yourself" with massages, haircuts, and gifts — all for free.

The parts that ring true in Agora's marketing letter, meanwhile, are the anecdotes describing free trips taken by travel writers. It is widely known that airlines, resorts, cruise lines, foreign governments, and other players in the travel industry often pay expenses for travel writers.

asserts that there is no way self-employed writers can make a living without accepting free trips. He argues that the practice does not necessarily result in puff pieces. "I believe the legitimate travel writer can be objective and still receive hosted trips," he says.

Some editors disagree. Miller acknowledges that newspaper travel sections are increasingly refusing to buy articles from free-lancers who take subsidized trips. He notes that some of these newspapers will, instead, use wire service articles or articles by book authors. Yet the wire service stories are often subsidized, he maintains, as are trips by book authors on promotional tours. Some publications, in his view, are just too strict.

Advertising-rich newspaper travel sections and magazines might actually be able to afford to pay expenses, he asserts, but don't because it's cheaper not to. "Behind every free-lance travel writer," he says, "are 1,000 other people who want to be travel writers." Miller's solution? Disclosure. He is waging, through the American Society of Travel Writers, a campaign to have all travel publications disclose to readers who paid for what.

The crowd-in-waiting of would-be travel writers now includes "a few hundred" holders of Agora press passes, according to Murawski. Asked if any buyers of the credentials have gotten valuable gratuities, she cites one person who received a complimentary rental car, another who toured the Louvre on a complimentary pass, and a third who was able to avoid the waiting lines at Expo '98 in Portugal. If buyers are not satisfied with the power of their Agora press pass, she says, they can get a refund.

— Frances Cerra Whittelsey

Whittelsey is articles editor at MAMM, a new magazine about issues surrounding breast and ovarian cancer.

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in most spheres of reporting, ethics dictate that reporters turn away freebies, while their news organizations pay their expenses. Not so for a lot of travel writing.

"In a perfect world, I would much prefer that my trip expenses were paid for by a newspaper or magazine, but the reality is different," says Jeff Miller, a free-lance travel writer for eight years who formerly was editor-in-chief of five in-flight magazines. Given the low fees most travel publications pay, Miller

HOW THEY PLAYED IT

It's no secret that the nation's daily newspapers and broadcasters give many big news stories a similar, and often predictable, amount of play. What about the stories whose placement is not so easily determined? CJR will take an occasional reading.

In October, Human Rights Watch and the D.C.-based Sentencing Project released a twenty-six-page report titled "Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States." The report revealed that throughout the country, 3.9 million parolees, ex-prisoners, and prisoners cannot vote. And because of several little-known laws in fourteen states — mainly in the South — more than two million of them will never vote again: convicted of a felony, their disenfranchisement is permanent. Of those, 1.4 million are black men, including one in three black men in Alabama and Florida. In Iowa, Mississippi, New Mexico, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming, one in four black men cannot vote.

Here is how some media outlets played the story:

In Newspapers:

■ *The Miami Herald* ran a front page story with extensive coverage.

■ *The Christian Science Monitor* ran a page-three story followed by an editorial criticizing disenfranchisement laws.

■ *The New York Post* published an editorial calling the report's authors "feather-brained ex-hippies."

■ *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* did not cover the story at all.

■ *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* ran short articles towards the back of the national news section.

■ *The Los Angeles Times* ran a seventy-seven-word story in its "nation-in-brief" section.

■ *The Chicago Tribune* had a short news piece and a subsequent op-ed piece.

■ *The Dallas Morning News* put an eighteen paragraph story inside the paper.

■ *The Birmingham News* carried a mid-length AP story in the Metro section.

On Television:

■ ABC's *Good Morning America* devoted

ed about three minutes to a fairly comprehensive story on the Sunday after the report's release.

■ NBC did not cover it.

■ CBS ran a brief segment on the *Evening News* and also on *CBS This Morning*.

■ CNN mentioned it on *Headline News*, but provided no detailed coverage.

On the Radio:

■ NPR's *All Things Considered* explored the issues addressed in the report and interviewed the Sentencing Project's assistant director, Marc Maurer.

■ Pacific News, CBS, and ABC News aired brief stories.

■ The African-American-run American Urban Radio Network aired a half-hour segment, which included calls from listeners.

— Sasha Abramsky

Abramsky is a writer who lives in Brooklyn.

LANGUAGE CORNER:

'WHOM' DOOMED? NOT YET

A lot of smart people hate the word. It can sound stuffy, and more importantly, it's very easy to get wrong. The great *New York Times* editor and language authority Theodore M. Bernstein, who almost certainly never got it wrong, nonetheless campaigned to "Doom Whom" (except after prepositions). He lost, at the *Times* and in the larger world. For anything approaching formal writing, "whom" clearly will be with us for a good while longer.

The most common who/whom problem arises in sentences where there's a distraction between the pronoun and the verb it goes with: "... he is a former All-Star whom the Knicks apparently feel can help them contend for a title." The distraction is the clause "the Knicks apparently feel." It's parenthetical; technically, we could put parens or commas around it. Do that, and it's instantly clear we wouldn't say "whom can help them." Inserting the parens or commas — just mentally, since they're not needed — will help us ignore the distraction and pay attention to what comes next.

— Evan Jenkins

For more on the language, see CJR's Web site at www.cjr.org.



WEB SITE SPOTLIGHT

R.I.P. GRIPES.COM



Visitors to the now-defunct News Mait Writers' Cooperative (www.newsmaut.com) will find the site's logo — a baying wolf — and a short, sad message (left) from its founder, *Florida Today* reporter Maurice Tamman. When he introduced a message board to the site in 1997, offering newspaper reporters the opportunity to grouse publicly — and anonymously — about their editors and newspapers, vitriolic responses poured in from around the country. News Mait even inspired a similar site, *News Blues* (www.newsblues.com), for television

reporters. But now the complaint window is closed. Besieged by controversy, *News Blues*, once available to anyone with an Internet connection, now requires journalists to shell out a \$20 annual membership fee for griping privileges.

— John Annese

Annese is a reporter for The Rivertowns Enterprise in Hastings, New York.

FRANCE

JUDICIAL REPRESSION

Imagine the situation: You're about to publish a major investigative book, proving that judicial corruption has destroyed thousands of businesses and up to one million jobs across the country. But the day the book comes out, instead of prosecutors opening files on your targets, a judge hits you with an injunction to pull it off the shelves, and enforces it with a fine of \$18,000 for every copy in circulation. At the end of the afternoon your publisher is looking at \$1 million in fines, and you still haven't had a chance to argue the merits of your case.

It happened in France last May. The book is called *The Mafia of the Commercial Tribunals* and was written by Antoine Gaudino, a former police officer who specialized in financial crime. It became a bestseller after a higher court set aside the injunction under a hail of front-page headlines and outraged declarations from publishers' associations. Says Gaudino's editor, Thierry Pfister, of the publishing house Albin Michel, which folded as a result of the injunction: "I knew there'd be a battle, but not to this level. I underestimated the adversary."

France is witnessing a judicial assault on investigative reporting of such scope that the daily *Libération* catalogued its high points on New Year's Eve under the front-page headline 1998: THE ANTI-MEDIA YEAR. Recent court decisions have crossed limits unseen in France since the censorship that stifled the press during the Algerian war. The effect is sometimes surreal: last August, film star Alain Delon succeeded in obtaining an injunction against a proposed biography by respected investigative reporter Bernard Violet.

As in Gaudino's case, Delon used a procedure called the *référé*, which allows a judge to block any book, broadcast, or article without hearing evidence as to its accuracy, pending review by a higher

court. Delon's lawyer piously declared: "Our desire is not to kill a book before it's hatched, but to prevent the publication of dirty and sexual anecdotes..."

Monicagate, massively reported here, has had a direct impact on this situation. French reporters are trying to avoid what they see as the Americans' mistakes, while still opening new ground for their own investigations. A red-hot case in point is the scandal now rocking the Constitutional Council, France's Supreme Court. The revelation



that council president Roland Dumas kept company with a self-described "whore," whose secret mission was to influence him on trade issues when he was minister of foreign affairs in 1990-93, has dinner parties howling. But it's no joke for Dumas: He is currently an official suspect (a prelude to indictment) on a charge of bribery.

The daily *Le Monde*, whose hard-edged coverage is driving the scandal, protested in a front-page editorial that the paper isn't committing "a condemnable aggression

against the presumption of [Dumas's] innocence and the respect of [his] private life." Ironically, *Le Monde* denounces the American press for doing exactly that to Bill Clinton. The difference is that French law entitles public officials to secrecy in their personal affairs, which until now has given them carte blanche to conceal matters of compelling public interest. Thus in 1996-97, the family of the late President François Mitterrand succeeded in banning a book by his personal physician, Claude Gubler, which revealed that Mitterrand lied to the public for fourteen years about the incurable cancer that finally killed him. What *Le Monde* argues, between the fine Gallic lines, is that the sexual corruption of a key national figure cannot always be a private affair.

The French media aren't innocent victims in this battle. A leading Paris libel lawyer complains that since their first successes in the early 1990s, "reporters have become incredibly arrogant. They think they can get away with anything." And like the wannabe Woodsteins of the late 1970s, some of them are making awful mistakes.

Example: last February, neophyte investigators Jean-Michel Verne and André Rougeot went on trial for having accused two former ministers of the republic, in their book *The Yann Piat Affair*, of ordering the assassination of a national assemblywoman. The prosecutor raged: "They dishonor their profession!" True, Verne and Rougeot relied to an appalling extent on anonymous sources to back their charges. But the prosecution came off no better. Eager to make an example of Verne and Rougeot, it rushed them to trial under conditions that resemble "an obstacle to the rights of the defense," as they complained to no avail in an open letter to Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. When they are finished in court, the betting is that their fines and suspended prison sentences will set a new record in French libel judgments.

What does the public think of this? If you believe a September survey by the CSA opinion institute, 72 percent of the French think reporters violate the rights of their subjects, 72 percent think the main concern of reporters is "increasing sales" of their newspapers, and 84 percent doubt that journalists get their facts straight. In short, the French are sure that their media are the menace.

— Mark Hunter

Hunter, a free-lance writer, lives in Paris.

Double Standard in Congress:

'No One Is ABOVE the Law'

**(EXCEPT
LAW-BREAKING
EMPLOYERS)**

The battle-cry of pious Congressional Republicans intent on impeaching the President has been: "No one is above the law." No one? What about unfair employers who routinely break the law when they fire workers who want to form unions? (When the National Labor Relations Board attempts to do its job and protect workers' rights, these same Republicans try to cut the agency's budget!)

Joining a union is the only right that people exercise with fear in their hearts. Each year 10,000 Americans are fired for supporting union organizing, a crime that never makes the 11 o'clock news. Except for strikes and scandals, unions don't exist in today's media.

Do the numbers for yourself: Union workers earn up to one-third more than non-union and are more likely to have pensions and health benefits. Surveys show that four in 10 workers who are not currently in a union would join one if their employer allowed them a free choice.

The fact they can be fired for exercising a right guaranteed by law, is most certainly a crime, but apparently not a newsworthy one — giving "law and order" Republicans a free ride to wink and nod at the law-breakers.

When I started out in construction in Philadelphia in the late 1950's, almost every newspaper in America had a labor reporter. We were an important story.

Today, only a handful of newspapers still have labor beat reporters who understand issues confronting working people. Which helps explain why reporters don't make the connection between the decline of unions and the decline of wages in this country.

The notion that employers benefit from keeping unions out and wages low is not written about, nor their collusion with the "soft on crime" Republicans in Congress.

That could be investigative reporting at its best — that is, if what happens to working people stirred any interest with today's media.

Martin J. Maddaloni,
General President



**United Association of Plumbers,
Pipefitters and Sprinklerfitters**

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darts & laurels

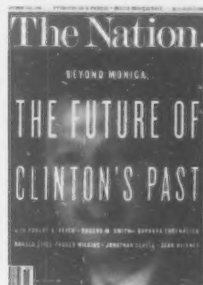
◆ **DART** to KCOP-TV, Los Angeles, reporter Sasha Foo, and co-anchors Tawny Little and Alan Frio, for their supporting roles in a dramatic series. Each of the first three segments of "Search for a Miracle," a five-part October tear-jerker that followed a young Santa Monica woman in her fight against bone cancer, was framed with hope-filled dialogue by Little, Frio, and Foo. "She's got two things going for her — faith and family support," said one. "And a lot of determination and a very strong family," added another. So it went, until — responding to protests from the patient's friends that the station was shamelessly withholding the outcome to keep viewers on the hook — reporting in the last two segments changed from present tense to past. For what viewers could not have known from the way the story was presented was that the woman had lost her battle two months before. As Howard Rosenberg, television critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, concluded in a November 11 column on "stagy news," "Either the anchors were epic boobs who didn't know [the woman] had died, or they were willing collaborators in this exploitative sham . . . In any case, the result was good theater, flagrantly deceptive journalism."

◆ **DART** to *The Herald News*, Fall River, Massachusetts, and the Newspaper Association of America, for bulldozing — instead of buttressing — the shaky ad/edit wall. *The Herald News* has been putting out an annual "Progress" edition each March that, while unidentified as advertorial, is nothing but. Admiringly promoted by the NAA as a "Big Ideas for Smaller-Market Newspapers" Progress editions are organized into eight sections ("Building & Buying," "Healthy Living," "Getting Around," and so on), distributed to readers over the course of four days. Advertisers fill out a form with information about their businesses, which is passed on to the newsroom. For every inch of ad they get an inch of staff-written editorial. Such is what the industry considers progress.

◆ **LAUREL** to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and staff writer Bill Moushey, for pursuing Justice — and catching it. Moushey's ten-part series, "Win at all Costs," exposed a growing crime wave perpetrated by overzealous federal agents and prosecutors hell-bent on conviction, just or not. Two years in the making (before the operations of independent counsel

Kenneth Starr in the Clinton probe drew attention to the issue), Moushey's investigation (November 22 – December 13) documented hundreds of instances during the past ten years in which agents and prosecutors withheld evidence, paid for fabricated testimony, engaged in cover-ups, and entrapped the innocent, some of whom are still in prison. Exploring the law-enforcement culture that allows such abuses to go unpunished, the series presented a compelling argument for stronger oversight of the Justice Department.

◆ **DART** to *The New York Times Magazine*, for its apparently underdeveloped photographic memory.



To illustrate a story on the unclear nature of Bill Clinton's legacy, the *Magazine* featured on its January 17 cover a stock photo of the president, purposefully blurred. That very same photo, similarly blurred by a free-lance designer to illustrate the very same subject, had appeared on the cover of *The Nation* four months before.

◆ **LAUREL** to the Flagstaff, Arizona, *Daily Sun*, for boldly crossing the border. In an October six-part series, "Lost Generation," the Anglo paper ventured into Indian territory that the tribal press too often fails to explore: the disturbing degree of rage and despair, especially among the young, on the Navajo Reservation. Gathering the signs — the rising rate of youth-gang assaults, domestic violence, child abuse, and attempted teen suicide — and observing new cracks in the traditional way of life — broken families, loss of tradition, and declining ties to the land — the series found that the Navajo Nation, already recognized as chronically ill with poverty, joblessness, and alcoholism, has reached "a critical condition" of hopelessness. As outsiders, the *Sun's* reporters mostly let their subjects — gang members, victims,

prosecutors, and cops; students and dropouts, peacemakers and medicine men; families that have fled the Rez, families that have stayed — tell their stories themselves. Added to those voices were reports on some of the policies, practices, and property laws that frustrate efforts to turn things around. The wrap-up editorial concluded eloquently: "Structural reforms . . . may first require a recasting of the treaty terms that have destabilized not only the Navajo Nation but many of the reservation tribes throughout the United States It's time officials in Window Rock and Washington D.C. recognized their failed relationship for what it is. The trail of human misery that began with the Long Walk is now stained with the blood of children. When will it end?"

◆ **DART** to the *Los Angeles Times*, for a dismaying sign of the times. On August 26, publisher Mark Willes, president Kathryn Downing, and editor Michael Parks enlisted some 400 employees, working in facilitator-led teams, in the task of creating a statement of the paper's mission over the next three years. One month, thirty-eight entries, and six finalists later, "Vision 2001" was complete: "We improve the performance of society by enriching, inspiring, invigorating, and educating our diverse communities. We are a trusted voice, providing compelling information and superior products and services through a living partnership with our readers, advertisers, employees, and shareholders. We excel by investing in our people in a dynamic work environment thriving on integrity, mutual trust, innovation, creativity, and teamwork." Note that the statement contains a total of sixty words — not one of which is "news."

◆ **DART** to *The Daily Progress*, Charlottesville, Virginia, for symptoms of investigative infirmity. A sensational summer discovery — that in 1995 two newborn babies had been switched at the local University of Virginia hospital and gone home with different parents — cried out for an invasive examination of just how such a tragedy might have occurred. Instead, the paper seemed content to let outsiders — *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and the *Richmond Times Dispatch* — unearth challenges to the hospital's repeated claims of innocence (and to bury many of those revelations in the jump). One possible reason the hospital got such tender treatment: as disclosed by the alternative weekly *C-Ville*, Marguerite Beck, the hospital's director of media relations and chief spokesperson for the story, is married to Wayne Mogielnicki, editor of *The Daily Progress*.

◆ **DART** to *Los Angeles Times* reporter Richard Serrano, latest nominee for membership in the Curious Coincidences Club. Serrano's book, *One of Ours: Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City Bombing*, published by Norton in 1998, bears a number of striking resemblances to Brandon Stickney's *All-American Monster: The Unauthorized Biography of Timothy McVeigh*, published by Prometheus in 1996. Similarities between Serrano's unsourced volume and Stickney's extensively referenced work include substantive sentences and overall approach. Similarities also include a couple of trivial, though telling, mistakes — to wit: "*The Last Day*," Stickney wrote of a 1980s film about "a notion of nuclear holocaust imbedded in [McVeigh's and his survivalist friends'] heads chronicles World War III's effect on a small town." "*The Last Day*," wrote Serrano about "[a movie] that took hold of [McVeigh] told the story of the effect of World War III on a small town." As Stickney had discovered after his book went to press, the correct title of the movie is *The Day After*.

◆ **DART** to the Culpeper, Virginia, *News*, and staff writer Doug Davala, for succumbing to technological advances. Nine days after the Virginia State Police posted for the first time on the Internet its registry of all state residents convicted of violent sexual offenses or crimes against minors, the *News* breathlessly took note. As the headline proclaimed, the sex offenders list, searchable by county, city, zip code, and first or last name, and linked to addresses, physical characteristics, conviction records, and photographs, was LOADED WITH CULPEPER NAMES. Indeed, Davala discovered, "with its 225 listed individuals, Culpeper alone is home to over 200 more convicted violent sex offenders than are its four adjacent counties combined. . . ." His 1,200-word story went on to consider possible explanations. Those explanations, however, did not include the obvious one, later offered by a local resident in a letter to the editor. "A cursory view of the Web site," wrote attorney Samuel R. Walker, "quickly reveals that almost every name listed for Culpeper County has the same address — a post office box number in the town of Mitchells. Surely, some news person at your paper was aware (or should have been aware) that there is a state prison located at Mitchells. If one didn't know that, didn't it occur to anyone to follow up on why 200 entries on the registry had the exact same address? Duhhh!"

This column is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.

WE'RE ALL NERDS NOW

The Digital Reporting Revolution Is Reaching Warp Speed. Here's Why

BY JOEL SIMON WITH CAROL NAPOLITANO

"I'm still stunned by it. Two years ago if you had told me that the Internet was the greatest reportorial tool since the telephone, I'd have laughed. It was still just for us geeks."

Stephen C. Miller, The New York Times

Ricardo Sandoval was one of those geeks. The turning point for him had come way back on July 1, 1993, after a deranged gunman in San Francisco killed eight and wounded six. All Sandoval knew about the shooter, who had killed himself, too, was that he was from the Los Angeles area. Sandoval, then a reporter at the *San Francisco Examiner*, used an electronic bulletin board — a precursor to the World Wide Web — to plug the man's name into a database of real estate records. There he found home and business addresses for the gunman as well as the names of his neighbors. He e-mailed the information to fellow *Examiner* reporter Jim Herron Zamora, already on a plane to L.A. to pursue that end of the story.

The killings at 101 California Street helped make Sandoval, now the Mexico correspondent for Knight Ridder, a technophile. These days he crunches large volumes of numbers with software, analyzing such arcana as import/export data, and downloads huge files from the Internet. He accesses e-mail from the Sierra Madre. Recently, while reporting a story about pesticide use in Mexico, he went online and found out which pesticides banned in the United States had been exported across the border.

But the news today is that there are so many Sandovals. Sometimes we fail to appreciate the pace at which technology has been changing our jobs. Think for a moment: palm-sized computers provide features

useful to newsgathering that were not available on the most powerful laptops just five years ago. With a well-organized laptop and a good Internet connection, a reporter in virtually any part of the world has access to the same information — whether from his own archived files or another database — as someone in the newsroom. With digital cameras, photographers file their shots through e-mail so quickly that an editor can look at the image and, before the event is over, call back on a cell phone to request a different angle.

It is in computer-assisted reporting where the real revolution is taking place, not only on the big analytical projects but also in nuts-and-bolts newsgathering. New tools and techniques have made it possible for journalists to dig up vital information on deadline, to quickly add depth and context. Even spreadsheet analysis and other serious number crunching — once the province of investigators and nerds — are increasingly being used on beats.

Joel Simon is the Americas program coordinator at the Committee to Protect Journalists, in New York. Carol Napolitano is the project team leader at the Omaha World-Herald.



"EVERYONE SHOULD BE INVITED TO THIS PARTY"

Brant Houston

"The whole reporting world is going crazy with this stuff," says J. Robert Port, a special assignment editor at The Associated Press. "It's changed the whole drill . . . I can find out if a person has been sued, or divorced, or whether he or she has a criminal record. I can locate within five minutes any person in the United States who uses a credit card or has a bank account, and I can probably locate his or her family members and address history in less than thirty minutes. This may not work for Ted Kaczynski, but it will work for just about everyone else."

The use of databases and Web searches on breaking stories has become nearly routine. For a recent story on land purchases by members of the International Olympic Committee, AP reporters on computers in New York combed through databases of real estate records in Utah. When a clam boat went down off the coast of New Jersey early this year, AP researchers culled from their databases the address of the company that owned the vessel and the date of the last time she was inspected, as well as the address history of a missing crew member and the phone numbers of his neighbors. All in half an hour.

A lightbulb went off for Port in 1996 when a commuter plane crashed in rural Georgia. An AP reporter used a database called PhoneDisc to instantly acquire the phone numbers of everyone in

the vicinity. Neighbors described the scene, and the AP put a detailed story on the wire before a single reporter could get there.

The spread of the new technology in the last few years has clearly made reporters faster and much more productive. At a higher level, it is doing more than that. Even as computer-reporting techniques spread into the main newsroom, adding

depth and context, they continue to make possible the longer, analytic projects. (See the "How [My Computer and I] Got That Story" articles in the following pages.) Steadily improving technology, as well as increasing levels of skill at using it, has led to better stories.

At its best, computer-assisted reporting helps get reporters beyond anecdotal research to a place where they can be more critical in their thinking and more definitive in their findings. The father of what he calls "precision journalism" — applying social science methods, such as survey research or public-record analysis, often with the aid of computers — is Phil Meyer, a Knight professor of journalism at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. "Reporting used to be like hunting and gathering for food," Meyer says. "All you had to do was get the information and bring it back. After food became plentiful, interest went to processing and packaging."

Computer-assisted reporting, he continues, allows reporters to dig into this "overabundance of information to find what's relevant. It's a sieve, and it's a way to uncover concealed patterns that aren't visible with ordinary reporting."

Computers have "given us at least the ability to be less reactive," says Steve Doig, a former *Miami Herald* reporter and edi-

(continued on page 22)

A MURDER STORY FIRST MADE HIM SEE THE POWER OF THE NEW REPORTING TECHNOLOGIES

Ricardo Sandoval



USA TODAY

HOW (MY COMPUTER AND) I GOT THAT STORY

EXAMINING A BIG SCHOOL TEST

BY HEATHER NEWMAN

NEWSPAPER: *The Detroit Free Press*, January 19-21, 1998

HEADLINE: TESTING MEAP SCORES

REPORTERS: Heather Newman, computer-assisted reporting specialist; Tracy Van Moorlehem, education writer

NUTSHELL: The *Free Press* proved that Michigan's standardized test scores, which had been widely used to compare the performance of school districts against each other, did not accurately measure quality of instruction or administration.

WEB ADDRESS: www.freep.com/news/meap/index.htm

The hoopla started every time the Michigan Department of Education released results from the state's elementary and middle school standardized tests. Districts jostled to be named the best in the state. Realtors and custody lawyers updated their files, ready to convince customers and judges that one school district outperformed another. The state was also using Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) results as the main criteria for accrediting schools, a process that can affect state aid.

Year after year, the *Detroit Free Press* helped build the hoopla. We listed the percentage of students with satisfactory scores as defined by the state, ranked the districts from top to bottom, and got quotes from schools at both ends of the spectrum.

Yet at the *Free Press*, we had wondered for some time whether the way the test results were presented and used was fair. We knew that the same districts always floated to the top or sank to the bottom. We knew, too, that a large pile of academic research said factors outside of a school's control have an effect on scores — factors such as poverty or parental education or the school's student turnover

rate. But how much of an effect did those factors have on Michigan test scores? And was it right to make the scores a measure of how well teachers and administrators were doing their jobs?

We decided to find out. Six months and a tangle of statistical tests later, we published our three-day series. We found that when it comes to test scores in both urban and suburban areas, factors beyond teachers' control actually account for far more than what teachers or administrators do. This was our first major statistical project, and we drew from my experience at an advanced statistics seminar and from the experiences of other newspapers trying similar ideas, such as the *Omaha World-Herald*, which had produced a 1997 test scores project. We combined and crunched numbers from six federal and state databases, using a statistical technique called multiple linear regression. Here's how it works:

Regression analyses attempt to show whether one number correlates, or moves, with another number. In this case, we wanted to measure the possible relationship between a district's MEAP scores and such uncontrollable factors as parental education or poverty. To do that, we took all the school districts in Michigan that had complete data on these social factors — everything from the percentage of single parents to the percentage of students who left the schools each year to the money given each year to the district. We checked results from more than 520 districts (out of a total 555 in Michigan) and looked at them as a population.

If you plotted these districts on a chart, with the vertical line representing, say, the average percentage of fourth-graders to pass the MEAP reading and math tests in a given year, and the horizontal line being, say, the percent of households with children in that district that were in poverty, you might get a graph that looks like this hypothetical example:



You can see that as poverty increases in the example, test scores tend to decrease. The dots, meanwhile, almost



Heather Newman, left, and Tracy Van Moorlehem

seem to cluster along an imaginary line. Statistical regression attempts to draw that trend line (hence "linear regression"). So you might end up with a line that looks like this:



How steep the line is tells you how much of an impact one factor — poverty, for example — has on the other factor, test scores. The last step in the regression is to determine how closely those dots really do cluster around the line. The closer they are, the more accurately one factor can predict another. Multiple linear regression is the same kind of analysis, except that you can look at more than one factor at a time. Fortunately, there are computer programs that do the work of figuring out how closely the dots fit and what the line should look like.

We were very nervous doing this work. For one thing it was complicated stuff, and it would have been easy to publish impressive-looking charts without knowing exactly what we had created or what it meant. Also, any mistake we made could be multiplied hundreds of times as we published the results for each district in the state.

We eased our angst by running our analysis past every statistics expert we could get to sit still. We hired a consultant in the educational statistics department at Michigan State University. We asked pro-

fessors from around the country to review what we had done. We sat down with representatives from several school districts to run through what we

were planning to publish. Each time an expert suggested a new factor or a new double-check, we re-ran the analysis. (We offered interested readers an extensive technical white paper on our methods, and more than 150 asked for it. For a copy e-mail newman@freepress.com.)

It's a testament to all that advance double-checking that no one questioned the methods we used to create our report. The series did generate a small storm of controversy because of a philosophical question: Were we, by implication, excusing schools from living up to a universal performance standard? Should there be absolute levels of learning that schools should live up to, regardless of where their students start?

Some officials, including MSU's president, felt that we were letting districts off too easily, and wrote in to make that point. One of the stories in the series dealt with precisely this question, and it's not one that our analysis could answer. We had shown that the MEAP tests measure the knowledge that a group of students has retained, but that they shed no light on how well (or poorly) the schools and teachers have done to help those students learn since scores alone don't factor in such powerful variables as poverty, parental education, family structure, and so forth.

The series has won a state press association award, has been featured on the cover of *Education Week*, and has been cited by a number of educational agencies and nonprofit groups as an example of how test scores should be considered: that is, with some kind of context about the students' advantages or disadvantages before they walk in the school door. It also changed forever the way we report scores in the *Free Press*. We stopped running our test-score lists in top-to-bottom order. With the help of education researchers, we came up with a new way to display the improvement of a school district from one year to the next (without discriminating against districts that are already at the top of the score scale). This is the way we now report most standardized scores in Michigan. There have been few projects here that have had such an impact on the way we cover the news. ●



COMPUTER-ASSISTED REPORTING "MEANS A LOT OF DIFFERENT THINGS TO A LOT OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE A LOT IN COMMON"

Phil Meyer

tor who now holds the Knight Chair in Journalism at Arizona State University. "Instead of looking at a few trees in the forest, we can look at the entire forest and state with authority the problem."

Over the last decade, the variety and complexity of newsroom computer skills has mushroomed. From simple use of the Internet to the analysis of complex data and social statistics, from spreadsheets to complicated mapping to setting up intranets and other internal newsroom data-delivery systems — no one can be expected to do it all. "Ten years ago I was a master of all parts of computer-assisted reporting," says Doig. "Now, it would be unrealistic for anybody to think he or she commands expertise across the spectrum."

As the field matures and broadens a dispute has emerged about its focus. Meyer, for one, thinks the term "computer-assisted reporting" should be abandoned. The words now "mean a lot of different things to different people who don't have a lot in common," he says. "Many journalism schools, including my own, have decided it means online searching, and that's it. We need a more precise term. We're

Stephen Miller



**"MANAGEMENT SAYS, 'HEY,
WE SPENT A LOT OF MONEY ON
THIS STUFF, SO USE IT'"**

losing it to online searching and to those applications that are just going through public records and coming up with lists." Those who are interested in "the deeper analytic techniques, finding patterns that aren't visible to the naked eye," Meyer says, "should band together and, maybe out of self-protection, form some kind of professional association to keep our identity clear."

But others argue that the computer-assisted reporting tent *ought* to be a very big one. Brant Houston, a former reporter in Boston, Kansas City, and Hartford and now the executive director of the University of Missouri-based Investigative Reporters and Editors (www.ire.org), says simple and complex-scale computer reporting both have their place, and that, in any event, a reporter with limited skills can build on those skills. "It improves our credibility whenever we give stories more depth and more context," he says. "Everyone should be invited to this party."

The computer-reporting revolution has spread thanks in part to techno-evangelists like Houston. Under him, IRE has continued to push computer skills via the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, which IRE runs with the University of Missouri's School of Journalism. NICAR focuses, to a large extent, on obtaining, understanding, and analyzing electronic public records, and it has trained some 12,000 reporters and editors over the last five years in "boot-camp" seminars as well as larger conferences. (The next is a joint presentation with *The Boston*



Steve Doig

"INSTEAD OF LOOKING AT A FEW TREES, WE CAN LOOK AT THE ENTIRE FOREST"

Globe, set for March 11-14 in Boston, with some 500 expected to attend.)

On a smaller scale, Bill Dedman, former director of computer-assisted reporting at the AP, holds seminars in newsrooms, focusing on the use of computer techniques to improve deadline and beat reporting. These can range, he says, from learning more effective Web searching to building small local databases (comparing county tax rates, for example) to getting and analyzing public data (such as matching campaign contributions to government contracts). Dedman, who also teaches a journalism course at Northwestern and writes part-time for *The New York Times*, says overemphasis on the newest gizmos and the biggest projects can alienate editors who want to produce quality breaking news on a budget. Alongside the big projects, he says, "we need more computer-assisted paragraphs and sentences."

Dedman has his own recent examples of such headline paragraphs, from a piece he wrote for the *Times* after last year's fatal shooting of a Capitol police officer in Washington. He was assigned to look into the background of the shooter, who was from Illinois. Using the Internet, Dedman located a reference to a security consultant who formerly worked for the Secret Service. Another search turned up the consultant's Web site, including an e-mail address. Dedman sent the man a late-
(continued on page 24)

DELINEATING CRIME

BY CAROL NAPOLITANO

NEWSPAPER: *Omaha World-Herald*, November 8, 1998

HEADLINE: OMAHA CRIME: A SPECIAL REPORT

REPORTERS: Carol Napolitano and Stacie Hamel, project team leaders; Angie Brunkow, Todd Cooper, Cindy Gonzalez, Robert Nelson, and Randy Tucker; with Jeanne Hauser and Michelle Gullett

NUTSHELL: The paper used seven years of crime data to break down and map the occurrence of crime in Omaha, and to shed light on its costs and on possible solutions.

WEB ADDRESS: www.Omaha.com/OWH/CrimeReport

When OMAHA CRIME — twelve pages of articles, photos, and maps — was finally published, it marked the end of a long struggle for the *Omaha World-Herald*. The newspaper had been trying for seven years to pry loose the electronic crime records that the police and sheriff's departments store on the county's mainframe computers. Jeff Gauger, assistant managing editor, was a reporter when he wrote the first letters requesting the data back in the beginning of 1991.

"I was really enamored with using a spreadsheet and an old Paradox database," Gauger says. "I thought, Jeez, think of the potential opportunities for stories if we could get all these records." But city and county officials employed a variety of tactics to try to delay or prevent the release of the records — nearly 13 million of them.

For starters, there was a so-called indemnification agreement that the county demanded, absolving it of all liability concerning the accuracy of the data and requiring the paper to pay for the county's defense if someone sued. The newspaper refused to sign it.

An entire year — 1994 — was wasted because the county attorney refused to respond to multiple letters from the paper's lawyer. Next, officials used a stream of technical jargon to explain why they couldn't copy the data for us. Until I

was hired in November 1995, no one on staff had enough knowledge to effectively respond to that technobabble.

Then, after negotiations in early 1996 produced an informal agreement, the police demanded a \$1 per record "handling fee" (a total of nearly \$13 million, if you're counting), plus the several thousand dollars they wanted for extracting the data from the computers.

In September 1996, the *World-Herald* sued for the records, and an out-of-court agreement was reached to provide the newspaper with the crime data. The first installment arrived in June 1997. It was then that we began the process of understanding, analyzing, and mapping the data that would be the basis of our report.

The huge volume of information presented us with many challenges. For one, the paper had to buy a PC with high power and storage room. For another, data entry by the police and sheriff had been sloppy. We spent month upon month checking, cleaning up, and standardizing. Some of the database documentation was missing descriptions and other vital information, forcing us to return to the police department and county computer technicians with hundreds of questions.

By late August 1998, the *World-Herald* was ready to take the numbers it had compiled and the maps it had created and use them to begin its shoe-leather reporting. This conventional reporting work was the soul of the special report. Without it, readers would have had nothing but hundreds of numbers, with no context in which to understand them. Numbers strengthen a story and in many cases provide the foundation on which a story is reported. But numbers should never be the story. The story is the people affected by those numbers.

Accordingly, five reporters and I spent the next five weeks out on Omaha streets and on the phone interviewing residents, crime victims, business leaders, neighborhood leaders, government officials, law enforcement officers, academic experts, and one convicted burglar.

During that time we continued to analyze the data in order to supply the reporters with more insights and facts. We wanted to draw the most detailed of pictures. Before this, the citizens of Omaha had never seen any details about crime in their city. To this day, the police still do not

have the technology to conduct their own analysis of crime patterns, and several times in the past seven years the basic crime counts police released turned out to be inaccurate. "We felt it was up to us to give our readers a baseline for the discussion that needed to be had about effectively dealing with crime in our community," says Deanna Sands, the *World-Herald's* managing editor.

The effort took seventeen months and a lot of dollars — staff time, legal fees, newsprint — but the paper believes in such projects. As Sands puts it, computer-assisted reporting "offers us a



Carol Napolitano

way to get at objective, factual data that can inform traditional reporting. Otherwise, we're often reduced to repeating what other people tell us without being able to test its veracity."

OMAHA CRIME finally rolled off the presses in November 1998 — stories and maps about where crime had occurred over seven years; features on high-crime areas; pieces on what to do about high crime rates, and about how police in other parts of the nation use this kind of crime data to improve their work.

I had an odd initial reaction. I thought, "Is this all there is?" It looked pretty simple. Good stories and photos, decent maps (despite our old presses), lots of information. But we could not boast about some novel statistical analysis or that we had unearthed some government secret.

I came to realize that the simplicity itself was the project's strength. We had produced a readable, balanced, fair, and informative section about crime from nearly 13 million convoluted mainframe computer records. •





HER HARD DRIVE IS FULL OF LOCAL-GOVERNMENT DATABASES

Stephanie Reitz

night message and heard back immediately — from Fiji, where the consultant was vacationing. The consultant steered Dedman to a publicly available Secret Service report about the minds of assassins; that became the basis for his story.

Sarah Cohen, formerly the training director at NICAR, points out that the computer-assisted reporting revolution was, until recently, a bottom-up movement, driven largely by a few mid-sized newspapers and by individual reporters. Now such reporters are everywhere. At *The Hartford Courant*, for example, Stephanie Reitz, a reporter with the Manchester bureau (and a self-described "math idiot"), used a spreadsheet to report a story tracking voting patterns in local elections in November. Reitz first got hooked on computer reporting back in 1995 when she dumped the Waterbury municipal budget into a spreadsheet and quickly debunked the mayor's claim that he was keeping a tight lid on spending. Today, her hard drive is full of local-government databases, from property tax records to local dog-license data ("Lots of great unlisted phone numbers in there," she says).

At *Newsday*, Ford Fessenden was able to flesh out TWA's safety history very quickly after Flight 800 hit the water. Doug Smith, who covers the Los Angeles Unified School District for the *Los Angeles Times*, used computer-assisted reporting and traditional shoe leather to assess complaints that the city was short-changing some neighborhoods in capital improvements.

Computers, he says, did the "nearly impossible" task of making sense of the district's 1,000-page book on capital projects. Smith plugged the information into a database, analyzed the numbers, and mapped the projects. With traditional reporting, he was then able to sort out which complaints were legitimate.

Among the papers that have made significant

investments in computer-assisted reporting are the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune*, the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, the Omaha *World-Herald*, the Dayton *Daily News*, the Asbury Park Press, the Seattle *Times*, the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, the Raleigh News & Observer, the San Jose *Mercury News*, the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, the Detroit *News*, the Detroit *Free Press*, the Charlotte *Observer*, and the Miami *Herald*.

At the *Herald*, computer-assisted reporting specialist Neil Reisner works informally with other journalists to get them to use technology more effectively in their daily reporting. "A reporter who is not e-mail literate, who doesn't know how to use attached files, cannot do his job," he says. Reisner has used computer techniques on all sorts of stories — from a study of school-district demographics to an analysis of boating-accident statistics to a Valentine's Day piece generated from demographic data about which neighborhoods in the *Herald's* circulation area contain the most single people.

Andy Lehren performs a similar function for *Dateline NBC*. But experts in the field say he is the only such full-time computer specialist in network news. The networks are behind the curve, even as local television struggles to catch up. Five years ago, Cohen says, hardly any TV people at all came to NICAR's sessions. Now they make up at least a third of the students.

Once the big newspapers get on board, they

tend to do it in a big way. At *The New York Times*, says Stephen C. Miller, assistant to the technology editor, a thirty-person tech department, made up of reporters and editors like Miller, supports and trains colleagues on how to incorporate the new tools into reporting. The *Times* recently finished giving every reporter and editor a PC or Mac, with which they can work not only the Atex mainframe but also the Internet, via a Windows system. They increasingly do so, he says, not only because reporters are interested but because "management says, 'hey, we spent a lot of money on this stuff, so use it.'"

Among Miller's recent tasks has been to design "How to Cover a Beat Electronically" tutorials for reporters. "There is so much stuff out there, I'm stunned by it. It's as if a virus suddenly infected everyone and made them put every scrap of information on the Web."

Meanwhile, the technology keeps improving and the resources keep expanding. New databases spread like kudzu, from the United Network for Organ Sharing (which contains an extensive database on organ transplants — www.unos.org) to national telephone directories like Yahoo! People Search (www.four11.com), to the vast stores of U.S. government information available online, including campaign contribution records and analysis (www.vote-smart.org) and congressional testimony (<http://thomas.loc.gov>).

As online versions of newspapers proliferate on the Web, reporters can read what's going on everywhere from Colombia (www.elcolombiano.com) to Yemen (www.al-ayyam-yemen.com). Using new translation software, like Systran, available on the AltaVista Web site (www.altavista.com), you can translate text (or even Web pages) from German, Spanish, French, or Italian into a crude but understandable English.

Search functions are also improving. Super-fast modems are fueling the development of what are known as content-based retrieval systems, which allow users to search for graphic images and scan photo and video archives for a specific shot.

Content-based searches will likely make easier the journalistic use of satellite (continued on page 26)



Neil Reisner

"A REPORTER WHO CAN'T USE ATTACHED FILES CAN'T DO HIS JOB"



Top row, left to right: Jo Craven, Jeff Leen, Ira Chinoy; front row: Sari Horwitz and Marilyn Thompson

QUESTIONING THE COPS

BY JO CRAVEN

NEWSPAPER: *The Washington Post*, November 15-19, 1998

HEADLINE: DEADLY FORCE: DISTRICT POLICE LEAD NATION IN SHOOTINGS

REPORTERS: Jeff Leen, Jo Craven, David Jackson, and Sari Horwitz, with editors Rick Atkinson, Marilyn Thompson, and Ira Chinoy, and researchers Alice Crites and Margot Williams

NUTSHELL: The newspaper used computer data and shoe-leather reporting to prove that police in the District of Columbia killed more people per resident in the 1990s than any other big-city U.S. police force. The investigation also revealed a pattern of shootings that involved reckless and indiscriminate gunplay by officers with inadequate training and little oversight.

WEB ADDRESS: <http://washingtonpost.com> (click on "Metro," then "Special Reports," and then "Deadly Force.")

What was interesting about the FBI's standard release of the Supplementary Homicide Report was what was missing: In the 1995 data, released in 1996, the electronic records for the U.S. did not have a single "81" in the circumstance field — the code for justifiable homicide by a police officer. This suggested that whole records were missing. And the FBI's own documentation provided another clue that this was so: a printout accompanying the data suggested that 287 homicide records were missing.

Once *The Washington Post* got the data for 1990 to 1996, they suggested something startling — that the Washington, D.C., police had shot and killed more people per capita during that period than any large city police department

in the country, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, and New Orleans. Per capita figures aside, the raw numbers of justifiable homicides by D.C. police officers alone were remarkable. In only a handful of cities — all much larger than Washington — had police shot and killed more people. But these records served only as a starting point. The data suggested the outlines of what we would then research for the next eight months.

In fact, as the project progressed, the *Post* decided against relying on the FBI's justifiable homicide records to calculate police killings, both those in D.C. and in the cities we compared with the District. Some criminologists have questioned the data's accuracy, and, because of this and other concerns, including missing records and ambiguities in what some records mean, the *Post* chose to survey police departments directly, in person and via a standard survey letter.

We focused on the twenty-seven cities that had at least 500,000 residents at any point between 1990 to 1996 (the latest year that Census figures were then available). As the data came in, we built a computer database. For verification, we compared the numbers we collected to those in the FBI data and to information from published reports. When differences showed up, we went back to the police departments. In some instances, we sought out other sources, such as state crime reporting programs or state attorneys charged with reviewing fatal shootings by police officers.

Once we had the numbers, the job was to understand them. After consulting criminologists and reading up on the subject, we determined that no single measure was adequate to put into context the number of police shootings by a depart-

ment. Based on our research, we decided to gauge the fatal shootings against five measures: size of population, violent crime incidents, arrests for violent crime, homicides, and the number of uniformed police officers. These records we got electronically from the U.S. Census, the FBI Uniform Crime Report, and from NICAR, the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, in Columbia, Missouri, which helps journalists obtain and analyze public records.

To compensate for year-to-year fluctuations, missing information, and variation in the way departments may report crime or count fatal shootings by police, we averaged figures over several years. Then we calculated the number of fatal shootings per 100 homicides, per 1,000 arrests for violent crimes, per 10,000 violent crimes, and per 100,000 residents. We measured Washington against both the combined and individual rates for the other cities, as well as against a smaller group of cities with high murder rates.

By each of these measures, the number of fatal shootings by District officers was higher than the group's average, and often significantly higher. Only when measured against homicide — some criminologists say a high rate of homicide helps explain officer-involved shootings, since violence begets violence — did D.C. approach the norm.

To confirm the statistical significance of our findings, the *Post* consulted with Sarah Cohen, then the training director of the NICAR (she has since been hired by the *Post*). Cohen helped run a number of statistical tests, including regression analysis, to confirm the significance of our findings. We also submitted the findings to James Fyfe, a nationally recognized criminologist, for review.

(continued on page 26)

TECHNOLOGY

While we mined these federal databases for our comparisons, we also dug in locally. With a freedom of information act request, we got an electronic database from the D.C. Use of Service Weapon Review Board that purported to detail every firearm discharge by a District police officer from 1994 to May 1998, though the department had redacted officer names. We also collected nearly seven years of press releases from the D.C. police department on officer-involved shootings and built a database of the releases. This became a source for officer names. (We also found seven press releases on fatal shootings that had never made it to the department's Use of Service Weapon Review Board — the body charged with determining whether a shooting was justified.)

Another information act request yielded a list of lawsuits against the district, the Metropolitan Police Department, or its officers that involved a shooting. We examined each of these lawsuits, gleaned more details about the shootings and the officers, and sometimes information about the department's own investigations.

Eventually, we expanded our search to include police brutality and built a database of more than 300 lawsuits against the District, the police department, or its officers that had been settled or adjudicated. Finally, we used a computer program to map the district's police shootings, which provided a startling picture of the volume of the shootings and their concentration in the eastern half of the city.

Since the DEADLY FORCE series ran, D.C. Police Chief Charles H. Ramsey has doubled the number of hours D.C. officers must spend to re-qualify for their handguns, adding more than 100,000 officer-hours of use-of-force training. He has moved the responsibility for tracking and investigating officer-involved shootings to the department's internal affairs arm. And, in order to restore public confidence, he has asked the Department of Justice for help. Attorney General Janet Reno responded, saying that Justice will provide D.C. police with programs aimed at stemming the rate of fatal shootings by police and ensuring that such incidents are thoroughly investigated in the future. •

lite photographs, which can be used for reporting on hurricanes, forest fires, oil spills, or in monitoring troop movements halfway around the world. Christopher Simpson of American University's School of Communication says satellite images that once took months to retrieve can now be obtained in hours using the Internet and commercial services like

Space Imaging (www.spaceimaging.com) or the French agency Spot Image (www.spot.com). Very recent photos, of course, can be expensive — up to \$5,000. But many others are cheap or free. The Department of Defense, for example, offered aerial imagery showing destruction in Iraq only a few hours after the bombing (available on the Federation of American Scientists site, www.fas.org). Satellite images, Simpson points out, can be used to illustrate stories on, say, urban sprawl or flood risk.

What's next? Who knows? We can be reasonably certain that the future belongs to reporters who become more and more computer literate. The development of more powerful databases, likely to be available to all reporters in the newsroom through internal intranets, will mean that vast resources, from real estate records to campaign contributions to tax files, can be at every reporter's fingertips.

And the equipment will get cheaper and better: computers will become smaller and more powerful, Internet connections will become faster, and communication technology will make everybody even easier to reach. Pagers, digital phones, e-mail-ready cell phones, and new devices like the Motorola Iridium phone (which has a single number that can be accessed any place in the world) will mean we will never be out of earshot of an editor. The next generation of palm-sized computers may be able to receive and send e-mail from anywhere on the planet.

Advances in voice-recognition software may make it possible for reporters to record interviews on a computer chip, and then instantly transcribe the interview to their PC. Software already on the market can transcribe clearly enunciated speech; in a few years, it



"WE NEED MORE COMPUTER-ASSISTED PARAGRAPHS AND SENTENCES"

Bill Dedman

may become possible to capture complex, overlapping conversations.

New software could end the trauma of lost notebooks and faulty memories. SourceTracker, developed by former computer-reporting editor George Landau after he left *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, allows a reporter to organize his or her interviews over the years into an easily searchable database that can be instantly retrieved when an old story comes back into play.

John Pavlik, who directs the Center for New Media at Columbia University, envisions that journalists may soon wear a Buck Rogers-like pair of glasses equipped to access the Internet on voice command and scroll information across the lens. A tiny camera mounted on the glasses could send video and audio feeds directly to a newsroom, so that another reporter or editor could also follow the event.

Farther down the road, probably a couple of decades if the research being conducted continues apace, journalists and sources on opposite coasts might find a way to be electronically "together." Max Nikias, who directs the Integrated Media Systems Center at the University of Southern California, is developing "3D immersive" technology that would create the visual and aural sensation that people in different cities are sitting together around a conference table.

"There would be a 3D image on my left and when that person spoke it would sound like it was coming from the proper direction," says Nikias. He says such conferences would make possible complex presentations that can't be done well over the telephone. Or you could be somewhere in a desert or in a foreign hotel and feel as if you are sitting across the desk from your editors. That would be an advance, wouldn't it? ■

PUSHING A REGULATOR

BY ANDREW LEHREN

TV NEWSMAGAZINE: *Dateline NBC*, March 31, 1998

TITLE: BUS STOP

REPORTER/PRODUCERS: Bob McKelown/ Shachar Bar-On and Andrew Lehren

NUTSHELL: Because they are cheaper, many schools use vans instead of small school buses for small groups of children. But the vans are less safe than the buses, and federal law is supposed to prevent their sale for such use. *Dateline* showed not only how that law goes unenforced, but how easily it could be enforced. And how such enforcement would save lives.

WEB ADDRESS: www.msnbc.com/dateline (go to "archives" and look for "School Vans: Are They As Safe As Buses?")

Producer Shachar Bar-On came into my office shortly after I joined *Dateline NBC* about a year ago and wanted to know: Could we use computerized public records to show how a federal agency was not enforcing school bus safety laws?

We could. The law in question dealt with the use of vans instead of traditional yellow school buses, the smaller buses for ten to fifteen students. The vans are cheaper and cost less to operate. But experts say they

are far less safe for transporting students, mostly because they have far less structured protection and interior padding. Manufacturers of most large vans include warning letters, clearly stating "not a school bus." More than that, a little-known federal law forbids car dealers to sell such vans to schools.

The safety question is not hypothetical. In July 1994, a truck rammed a school van in South Carolina, killing six-year-old Jacob Strebler. Yet eighteen months earlier, in an almost identical accident in the same part of town, a truck had slammed into a small school bus and none of the children were seriously hurt. We examined hundreds of thousands of computerized fatal car accident reports as well as newspaper clippings. Jacob Strebler, we found, was one of at least a dozen children in this decade who died in vans that they were never supposed to be riding in. Most of them likely would have survived, according to experts consulted by *Dateline*, if they had been in school buses.

The law about vans vs. buses is a bit unusual: it is illegal for dealers to sell the vans to schools, but not for schools to own them. Since the 1974 law took effect, meanwhile, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has levied fines against dealers only ten times for selling vans to schools. The agency says it has only has so much staff to handle all its duties.

But by using our computers, *Dateline* was able to show how easily the agency could do this part of its job. We picked a state — Texas — and obtained its database for the purchase and sales of motor vehicles. There we found hundreds of vans that had been sold to schools. To help determine which vans are outfitted to transport children (and thus differentiate from vans used to haul equipment), we paid particular attention to vehicle identification numbers. These are a sort of automobile version of a Social Security number; they describe seating arrangements, and can be decoded with easily obtainable reference books or databases.



Vans are often used to transport school children despite a law that forbids their sale for such use. *Dateline* showed how the law could be enforced.

Thus, when we looked for vans bought by schools that were outfitted for transporting students, we found hundreds of examples. We followed up with spot-checking. The point was not only to show that vans were being sold to schools, but that it would not be hard to investigate and enforce the law. We were then ready to question NHTSA about its lack of enforcement.

This is not the first time *Dateline NBC* has used computer-assisted reporting. The show's executive producer, Neal Shapiro, has long fostered this kind of journalism. Before I joined the newsmagazine, for example, producer David Hinchman used computerized government records for stories on such subjects as troubled dams along the country's rivers, roads with high accident rates, and lax government enforcement of workplace safety rules. For a *Dateline* investigation of improper searches and seizures by police on Louisiana highways, David Washburn, now at the *Allen-town Morning Call*, examined how police used seized goods for personal gain. That kind of tradition means many key producers here understand the complexities and benefits involved in computer-assisted reporting. As recently as January 27, we used computerized records to examine shoddy truck safety.

The school bus story is also an example of a kind of piece that may not be doable in certain states, because of unfavorable privacy laws and rules on electronic access to data. While many states provide access to vehicle ownership records, others, like California and Florida, make such inquiries extremely difficult. It is another reminder that journalists need strong open records laws to do their job. ●

Dateline NBC's Andrew Lehren, with some of his data



SARA BARRETT

DEBUNKING A "TREND"

BY PAUL OVERBERG

NEWSPAPER: *USA Today*

HEADLINE: AGGRESSIVE DRIVING: A ROAD WELL TRAVELED

REPORTERS: Paul Overberg, database editor, and Scott Bowles, transportation reporter

NUTSHELL: Throughout much of 1997 and 1998, the media were discovering a dangerous driving phenomenon they labeled "road rage." When *USA Today* took a computer-assisted deeper look, the newspaper found a surprise.

WEB ADDRESS: www.usatoday.com/news/special/agdrive/driveix.htm

Like others, *USA Today* had reported the "road rage" story with anecdotes and experts' claims. The premise, that this trend was growing, seemed to ring true — early project meetings ran long as we traded personal horror stories. When we tried to verify and quantify the trend, however, the reporting turned complicated.

We knew there was no real definition of road rage, and we quickly found that there weren't even good measures of its level, let alone whether it was on the rise. It was, we reasoned, the tip of a dangerous iceberg called aggressive driving: acts like running stoplights and stop signs, speeding, and recklessness.

While my colleague, Scott Bowles, started talking to police, traffic, and safety experts, I started trying to find some answers with numbers. Direct measurement seemed impossible. Aggressive driving is fleeting and elusive. I thought about counting red-light runners, for example, but scrapped the idea because it would be too hard to do nationwide.

So I fell back on indirect measures. States keep computer files on tickets and accidents, but the contents and standards vary widely. The insurance industry maintains the best crash databases, but they're private. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration keeps detailed data on fatal crashes, but they make up just 0.5 percent of crashes

reported to police.

Then I found out about NHTSA's lesser-known General Estimates System. Because of the way its approximately 50,000 crashes are chosen each year, they make up a nationally representative sample of police-reported crashes. For each, the agency logs almost 100 items about the circumstances, vehicles, drivers, and passengers.

It took a couple weeks to get the data from NHTSA, import twenty-seven files to database software and fix problems due to bad documentation. As I do with any new human source, I asked the data lots of questions. Over a couple weeks, I ran several hundred queries to see what they knew, check it against other sources, and make sure that I understood what they were telling me.

We checked with experts, debated, and finally worked out a definition of aggressive driving that the data could shed light on: any crash with injuries where at least one driver was cited for running a stop sign or stoplight; or speeding; or failing to yield; or reckless driving. This closely matched working definitions used by AAA (formerly the Automobile Association of America) and NHTSA.

Finally, I applied our definition to the data for 1996 and 1998, the newest and oldest available. The results were startling: aggressive driving crashes made up about 20 percent of the total in both years.

What, no trend?

I checked intervening years. Again, no trend. I tweaked the definition, running hundreds of queries to look at all the crashes in the sample, then just at higher-speed crashes, crashes with only severe or fatal injuries, crashes involving just speeding citations, hit-and-run crashes, and crashes just at traffic signals.

But the 20 percent figure remained, suggesting that our definition was solid, and that the widely reported increase in road rage was a mirage. Meanwhile, we could peg the level of aggressive driving and tally its toll, something no one else

had published. The work also let us paint a portrait of aggressive driving. That led to more surprises. All else being equal, aggressive drivers were:

- Women as often as men.
- As likely to drive cars or minivans as pickups or sport-utility vehicles.
- Most prevalent in the West and South, least prevalent in the Northeast.
- Disproportionately under twenty-five, yet well-represented among the middle-aged.



Paul Overberg, above;
Scott Bowles

The annual toll extrapolated from the sample: 1,800 deaths, 800,000 injuries, \$24 billion in direct and indirect costs.

I wrote a cautious analysis for Scott and his editor, Lee Ann Ruibal. They were somewhat surprised, but Scott said it clicked with his reporting. No one could cite contrary data. Experts had begun to hedge on what could be interpreted from a key survey and a poll that had often been cited in media accounts about a road rage "epidemic." Best of all, Scott found traffic consultants who explained why our portrait made sense.

So we turned the project around completely. Instead of documenting a trend, we debunked it. But we also focused on the toll, including a page of victims' stories. We painted a detailed portrait with the data and quotes from experts and drivers. As we worked, NHTSA released the 1997 data. They didn't show a trend, either.

The project reminded me what a great tool database journalism is for challenging conventional wisdom, and for moving beyond impressions and anecdotes to get solid answers. ●



Covering Managed Care

A resource guide for reporters and editors

BY TRUDY LIEBERMAN

More than 170 million Americans now receive their health care through an HMO or some other managed care organization. The transformation that managed care has brought to American medicine is one of the biggest stories of our time. We journalists have not always told that story well.

Sometimes, in the rush to make our stories titillating and splashy, we in the news business have relied on anecdotes to "prove" that managed care is harmful. Sometimes we have mixed up issues of service and access to care with issues of medical quality and physician competence. Indeed, information about quality of care is elusive, and the word "quality" itself has become the most misused in the managed-care lexicon. Sometimes, in outlining shortcomings in some managed care, we have falsely portrayed as golden the fee-for-service era, forgetting all the warts on that model.

The fault is not entirely journalism's. Many practitioners, bent on protecting their incomes, have tried to use the media to further their cause. Other interests with high stakes in the medical business have tried to turn health care into a commodity, a product that easily can be

rated, one that people can choose like a car or a computer if they just have the "right" information. But getting the right information is not that easy.

After covering the subject for nearly a decade, I have concluded that managed care is the quintessential gray area. For all the anecdotes about patients denied care that they needed, there are just as many about people who are happy and have received good, even excellent care. In "good" HMOs, some members have received bad care; in "bad" HMOs, some people have been treated well.

The California Health Rights Hotline found that Medicare beneficiaries who get their care from HMOs are five times as likely to report problems as beneficiaries who get their care from fee-for-service doctors. Yet consider the outcry from beneficiaries when their HMOs withdrew from the Medicare program. Paradoxes like these abound in managed care, and they make our job of distilling the story so darn difficult.

We all know that the U.S. is not returning to unlimited, fee-for-service medicine. The managed-care story is not disappearing. It is dynamic, with new players appearing and old ones recasting their scripts as they look for ways to respond to the changing marketplace. The guide that follows aims to help journalists find out

who the key sources are and to cover the new structure in health care, including the business of managed care, the politics it is enmeshed in, and its effects on the health of so many Americans.

ACCREDITING ORGANIZATIONS

These organizations give seals of approval to managed care plans and other providers of health care, such as hospitals or nursing homes. Each of them writes its own criteria. Their reviews examine the processes and procedures health plans have in place for delivering care, in effect, requiring plans to meet minimum standards to win approval.

Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care
9933 Lawler Ave., Skokie, Ill. 60077, (847) 676-9610, fax (847) 676-9628, Web site: www.aaahc.org. Communication and marketing director Marcia Neuhart, executive director John Burke. Accredits some 900 health care facilities, including outpatient surgical centers. Mostly a marginal player, it has accredited seventeen HMOs and one independent practice association (IPA).

Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations
One Renaissance Boulevard, Oakbrook Terrace, Ill. 60181, (630) 792-5000, fax (630) 792-5005, Web site: www.jcaho.org. Communications director Cathy Barry-Ipema (630) 792-5631, president Dr. Dennis O'Leary. It accredits some 18,000 hospitals, nursing

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REPORTING

homes, home care agencies, clinical laboratories, behavioral health care firms, and ambulatory care centers, plus forty health-care networks, including HMOs and preferred provider organizations, or PPOs. To get accreditation reports, call customer service at (630) 792-5800.

National Committee for Quality Assurance
2000 L St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 955-3500, fax (202) 955-3599, Web site: www.ncqa.org. Communications director Barry Scholl (202) 955-5197; president Margaret O'Kane. NCQA is the primary accrediting organization for managed care firms; it has examined over 300 HMOs and nineteen managed behavioral health organizations, and certified forty-seven credential verification organizations, firms that contract with HMOs to review the credentials of physicians. Has four classifications for accrediting HMOs: full, one-year, provisional, and denial. Information on which plans are accredited and at what level is available on the Web site. NCQA also collects and disseminates health plan performance data (HEDIS). (See also "ORGANIZATIONS THAT DISSEMINATE DATA.")

The American Accreditation Health-care Commission/URAC

1275 K St. N.W. Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 216-9010, fax (202) 216-9006, Web site: www.urac.org. Press contact Guy D'Andrea, (202) 216-9010 ext. 16; president Garry Carneal, ext. 13. Organization began in 1990 to accredit utilization review firms, which decide whether certain treatments and procedures should be done. It has branched out to accredit other health care organizations such as HMOs and provider-sponsored organizations. It also certifies credential verification organizations.

ADVOCACY AND CONSUMER ORGANIZATIONS

These organizations, representing a wide range of interests, offer a consumer perspective on managed care.

Center on Disability and Health 1522 K St. N.W. Washington, D. C. 20005, (202) 842-4408, fax (202) 842-2402, executive director Bob Griss. Group makes sure managed care organizations are following the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Center for Health Care Rights

520 South Lafayette Park Place, Los Angeles, Calif. 90057, (213) 383-4519, fax (213)-383-4598, ext. 3012, Web site: www.evidence.com/CHCR/Index.html. Joseph Cislowski executive director; consumer protection director Peter Lee. Group has been involved with the Health Rights Hotline, an independent assistance program that has documented problems people are

having with managed care in the Sacramento area.

Consumer Coalition for Quality Health Care

1275 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 789-3606, fax (202) 898-2389, Web site: www.consumers.org. Senior associate for quality policy Andy Weber, executive director Brian Lindberg. Organization supports the monitoring of quality in managed care.

Consumers Union

101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, N.Y. 10703, (914)-378-2000, fax (914) 378-2900, Web site for subscribers only: www.consumerreports.org. Communications director Marc Kaplan; president Rhoda Karparkin. Washington communications director Kathleen McShea (202) 462-6262. Publishers of Consumer Reports, organization lobbies on behalf of consumers; supports managed care legislation that includes the right to sue health plans and a way for consumers to appeal decisions about their care to an independent third party.

Families USA

1334 G St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 628-3030, fax (202) 347-2417, Web site: www.familiesUSA.org. Communications director Lorie Slass, (202) 628-3030; executive director Ronald Pollack. Bills itself as the voice for health-care consumers and supports a far-reaching patients' bill of rights. Web site has studies on managed care.

Gay Men's Health Crisis

119 West 24th St., New York, N.Y. 10011, (212) 362-1000, fax (212) 367-1235. Director of health care access and public policy Susan Dooha (202) 367-1228. Tracks problems members have had getting care in health plans.

People's Medical Society

462 Walnut St., Allentown, Pa. 18102, (610) 770-1670, fax (610) 770-0607, Web site: www.peoplesmed.org. Communications director Mike Donio; president Charles Inlander. Watchdog organization that also offers health care information through a variety of publications. Believes managed care is a sound concept but that most managed care companies are deficient.

Public Citizen Health Research Group

1600 20th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009, (202) 588-1000, fax (202) 588-7796, Web site: www.citizen.org. Communications director Brian Dooley; director Sidney Wolfe. Believes for-profit managed care must be replaced by not-for-profit plans run by patients. Materials for reporters are listed on its Web site.

CAPITOL HILL SOURCES

These people are good contacts for information on patient protection legislation and other managed care matters before Congress.

Kathleen Means, chief health analyst, majority staff, Senate Finance Committee (Sen. William Roth, chairman)
219 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, (202) 224-4515.

Dede Spitznagel, health analyst, majority staff, Senate Finance Committee
219 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, (202) 224-4515.

Faye Drummond, senior health counselor, minority staff, Senate finance Committee (Sen. Daniel Moynihan, ranking minority)
203 Hart Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, (202) 224-5315.

Paul Harrington, health policy director, majority staff, Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee (Sen. James Jeffords, chairman)
835 Hart Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, (202) 224-6770.

David Nexon, health policy director, minority staff, Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee (Sen. Edward Kennedy, ranking minority)
527 Hart Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, (202) 224-7675.

Stacey Hughes, policy adviser, office of the assistant majority leader (Sen. Don Nickles)
S-208 Capitol Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, (202) 224-2708.

Ned McCulloch, counsel to Democratic Sen. Joseph Lieberman
706 Hart Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, (202) 224-4041.

Howard Cohen, counsel majority staff, House Commerce Committee (health subcommittee chair Rep. Michael Bilirakis)
2125 Rayburn House Office Bldg., Washington, D. C. 20515, (202) 225-2927.

Bridgett Taylor, professional staff, House Commerce Committee, minority staff (Rep. John Dingell, ranking minority)
564 Ford House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, (202) 225-3641.

Bill Vaughan, minority staff, House Ways and Means health subcommittee (Rep. Pete Stark, ranking minority)
1106 Longworth House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, (202) 225-4021.

Allison Giles, majority staff, House Ways and Means health subcommittee (Rep. William Thomas, chairman)
1136 Longworth House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, (202) 225-3943.

Jon Traub, legislative director, office of Rep. Greg Ganske
1108 Longworth House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, (202) 225-4426.

Rep. Charlie Norwood, a Republican and a major sponsor of patients' rights legislation
1707 Longworth House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, (202) 225-4101.

MANAGED CARE: A WORKING GLOSSARY

ACCREDITATION DATA

Information on how health plans have been scored by the organizations that accredit them. Among a number of other things, accrediting organizations look at whether a health plan has procedures in place to monitor improper withholding of services and whether there is a continuous quality-improvement program.

BEST PRACTICES

A term used by health care professionals to identify as a model practices of providers who are doing an outstanding job of delivering health care.

CREDENTIAL VERIFICATION ORGANIZATIONS

Firms that are paid by accrediting organizations to check physicians' credentials. These outfits uncover and verify such things as educational records, malpractice suits, adverse information in the National Practitioners Data Bank, and board certification reports that tell whether doctors have passed tests for competence in their specialty.

HEALTH MAINTENANCE ORGANIZATION (HMO)

An organization that collects premiums, usually from employers and employees, and uses them to pay providers to deliver health care for members of the plan. Care is usually managed or controlled in some way, like requiring members to first see a primary care doctor, who determines whether they can see a specialist.

HEDIS

An acronym that stands for Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set. It comprises a series of measures that reflect a plan's performance. Health plans collect data on things like the proportion of their members who got mammograms, eye exams, prenatal care, immunizations, and beta blockers after heart attacks. HEDIS also includes surveys of member satisfaction. Plans report their results to the National Committee for Quality Assurance, which then releases them to the public if the plans agree.

CLINTON ADMINISTRATION CONTACTS

These people know what the administration is thinking.

Christopher Jennings, deputy assistant to the president for health policy development

216 Old Executive Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20502, (202) 456-5560.

Michael Hash, deputy administrator, Health Care Financing Administration

Hubert H. Humphrey Bldg., 200 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20201, (202) 690-5727.

MEDICAID WAIVER

An arrangement in which a state has permission from the federal government to design its own program for Medicaid recipients, by-passing certain federal requirements.

MEDICARE + CHOICE

A program that allows for several new ways for seniors to receive Medicare benefits. The options include private fee-for-service, medical savings accounts, and provider-sponsored organizations as well as several managed care choices.

PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Proposed federal legislation that would require health plans to tell patients about treatment options, require plans to offer POS features, and cover some emergency care. Two contentious provisions are: allowing patients the right to sue the plan, and the ability to appeal treatment decisions to an independent third party.

PEER REVIEW ORGANIZATION (PRO)

These groups contract with the Health Care Financing Administration to monitor the quality of care given to Medicare beneficiaries.

POINT-OF-SERVICE (POS)

An option offered by a growing number of managed care organizations that allows members to receive care from out-of-network providers. Members usually pay higher premiums and a percentage of the providers' charges.

PREFERRED PROVIDER ORGANIZATION (PPO)

A loosely managed type of managed care organization. Consists of a network of providers who have agreed to offer care to members at a discounted rate. Usually does not have the type of restrictions found in an HMO.

RISK ADJUSTMENT

The process of adjusting for clinical and demographic characteristics — such as age or severity of illness — in reporting health outcomes and in setting appropriate payments to health plans.

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

Here are some of the more credible groups that produce studies and surveys on health care issues, including managed care.

Alpha Center

1350 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 296-1818, fax (202) 296-1825, Web site: www.ac.org. Communications director Carole Lee. Partly funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, it sponsors research and provides analyses of issues concerning managed care, health policy, finance, and insurance markets.

Agency for Health Care Policy and Research

2101 East Jefferson St., Rockville, Md. 20852, (301) 594-6662 (administrator's office), fax (301) 594-2283, Web site: www.ahcpr.gov. Press officer Karen Migdail (301) 594-6120; administrator John Eisenberg. Government agency that is working with private sector research groups to develop clinical evidence that doctors and managed care organizations can turn into their own guidelines for treatment.

Alliance for Health Reform

1900 L St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 466-5626, fax (202) 466-6525, Web site: www.allhealth.org. Communications director Bill Erwin; executive vice president Edward Howard. The Alliance, funded by several foundations, was formed in 1991 to hold forums and publish issue briefs on health care topics. Offers journalists a free managed care source guide that highlights key terms, key facts, and readings.

Center for Clinical Quality Evaluation

1140 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 833-3043, fax (202) 833-2047, Web site: www.ccqe.com. Executive director Ruth Ann Hadley. Set up thirteen years ago as the research affiliate for the peer review organizations (See also "Trade and Professional Associations"). Conducts programs aimed at improving health-care quality, such as reducing strokes via drug therapy.

Employee Benefit Research Institute

2121 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037, (202) 659-0670, fax (202) 775-6312, Web site: www.ebri.org. Communications director Danny Devine (202) 775-6308; president Dallas Salisbury. Funded by employers, unions, and employee benefits firms, EBRI has a reputation for solid, reliable research.

Foundation for Accountability

520 SW 6th Ave., Portland, Ore. 97204, (503) 223-2228, fax (503) 223-4336, Web site: www.facct.org. Communications director Doug Davidson; president David Lansky. FACCT is supported mostly by employers interested in evaluating health plans. Organization has developed a method for disseminating basic information about health plans, and how they fare in helping members prevent disease, live with disease, and recover.

Health System Change

600 Maryland Ave. S.W., Washington, D.C. 20024, (202) 484-3475, fax (202) 484-9258, Web site: www.hschange.com. Public affairs director Ann Greiner. Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, it analyzes and interprets changes in the health care system. Every two years it surveys consumers, physicians, and employers to assess how easy it is for people to get care as well as the cost of that care.

REPORTING

HMO Research Network

A group of twelve HMOs that have an academic research center as part of their operations. Group exchanges information that supports the research mission of managed care organizations. Contact: Dr. Richard Platt, research director Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, 126 Brookline Ave., Boston, Mass. 02215, (617) 421-6089, fax (617) 859-8112.

InterStudy Publications, Inc.

2901 Metro Dr., Minneapolis, Minn. (800) 844-3351, fax (612) 854-5304, Web site: www.hmodata.com. Marketing director Nancy Lincoln, competitive edge research manager Tammy Lauer. Publishes a three-volume survey of the HMO industry twice a year. Report is pricey — around \$500 — but some journalists can get free copies. Good source for data on HMO penetration in various markets.

National Coalition on Health Care

555 13th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004, (202) 637-6830, fax (202) 637-6861, Web site: www.americashealth.org. Communications director Pat Schoeni (202) 637-6830; president Henry Simmons. A group of 100 health plans, unions, employers, consumer groups, and trade associations that disseminates policy studies on health care delivery and medical practice. Has just launched a program to focus attention on high-quality health-care providers.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS CONSULTANTS

They offer consulting services to corporations, often have reports on health insurance offered by employers, and are good sources of objective information.

Hewitt Associates

100 Half Day Rd., Lincolnshire, Ill. 60069, (847) 295-5000, fax (847) 883-9019, Web site: www.hewitt.com. Public relations contacts Kelly Zitlow (847) 442-7660, Mike Jurs (847) 442-7655. Most Hewitt studies are not available to the press, but company officials can discuss trends in managed care.

KPMG Peat Marwick

3 Chestnut Ridge Road, Building 5, Montvale, N.J. 07645, (201) 505-3400, fax (201) 930-8617, Web site: kpmg.com. Press contact: Tim Gay (201) 505-3422; director of center for survey research Jon Gabel (703) 469-3369. Produces an annual study of health benefits that costs \$200, but some in the press might get it free.

William M. Mercer, Inc.

10 South Wacker Dr., Chicago, Ill. 60606, (312) 902-7500, fax (312) 902-7626, Web site: www.wmmerc.com. Press contact: Stephanie Poe (202) 331-5210; other press contacts: Blaine Bos (312) 902-7664 (cost and enrollment trends); Michael Millenson (312) 902-5146 (quality, accountability); Lew Devendorf (203) 973-2030

(HMOs); Dr. Paul Berger (404) 614-2956 (health-care providers). Releases a useful annual employee benefit survey.

Towers Perrin

335 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017, (212) 309-3400, fax (212) 309-3773, Web site: www.towers.com. Press contact: Stanley Davis (914) 745-4191; Joe Martingale, principal (212) 309-3694.

Watson Wyatt Worldwide

1055 Washington Blvd., Stamford, Conn. 06901, (203) 356-1220, fax (203) 964-9282, Web site: www.watsonwyatt.com. Contact: Helen Darling, practice leader, group benefits and health care (203) 977-6317.

EMPLOYER COALITIONS AND PURCHASING GROUPS

They buy health care on behalf of corporations and public sector employees. Coalitions can put journalists in touch with employers who have had significant experience offering managed care benefits.

Buyers Health Care Action Group

Northwest Financial Center 7900 Xerxes Ave. S., Bloomington, Minn. 55431, (612) 896-5190, fax (612) 896-5184, e-mail bhcag@isd.net. Web site: www.choiceplus.com. Executive director Steve Wetzell. Acts as a purchasing agent for employers in the Minneapolis area. Has devised a new model that calls for direct contracting between providers and employers.

Central Florida Health Care Coalition

4401 Vineland Road, Orlando, Fla. 32811, (407) 425-9500, fax (407) 425-9559. President Becky Cherney. Group has been collecting risk-adjusted hospital data for ten years to assess outcomes and various care interventions.

Colorado Business Group on Health

747 Sheridan Blvd., Lakewood, Colo. 80214, (303) 234-0387, fax (303) 234-0389. Director Donna Marshall. Manages quality-improvement projects on behalf of thirteen employers. Issues an annual report card on area managed care firms to employees.

Gateway Purchasers for Health

8888 Ladue Rd., St. Louis, Mo. 63124, (314) 721-7800, fax (314) 721-6784, e-mail gp4health@aol.com. Does group purchasing for thirty-six employers in the local market. Issues a report card on HMOs based on HEDIS data.

Greater Detroit Area Health Council, Inc.

645 Griswold St., Detroit, Mich. 48226, (313) 963-4990, fax (313) 963-4668, e-mail jkenney@msms.org. Web site: www.hiag.org, and gdah2.org. Vice president corporate communications Ron Beford (313) 965-4123; president J. Sean Kenney. A coalition of employers, unions, health plans, and health systems that promotes change in how health care is bought and used in southeast Michigan. Offers a

tool on its Web site that gives information on HMO performance measures, as well as data on how many times certain physicians perform specific procedures.

New England HEDIS Coalition

201 Gilmanton Road, Belmont, N.H. 03020. Contact Patrice Jackson (603) 229-2543, e-mail jacksonp@cyberportal.net. It encourages employers to submit comparable HEDIS data that buyers can use to choose health care plans. Conducts educational seminars for employers.

Pacific Business Group on Health

33 New Montgomery St., San Francisco, Calif. 94105, (415) 281-8660, fax (415) 281-0960. Web sites: www.healthscope.org (specific data on HMOs); www.pbgh.org (general information on the organization); www.calinx.org (information systems data initiative). Executive director Patricia Powers. The most active of the business coalitions, PBGH represents thirty-four public and private sector buyers of health care. Group negotiates health-care premiums on behalf of its members, and disseminates performance information about health plans.

FINANCIAL ANALYSTS

Some of these analysts say that they don't want to talk to reporters unless they represent large news organizations or unless their own public relations department gives the okay. We list them anyway. Perhaps you'll be lucky.

Ken Abramowitz

Sanford Bernstein and Co. 767 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10153, (212) 756-4590, fax (212) 756-4462.

Karen Boezi

Coral Ventures, 3000 Sand Hill Road Bldg. 3, Menlo Park, Calif. 94025, (650) 854-5226, fax (650) 854-4625.

Geoffrey Harris

Salomon Smith Barney, 388 Greenwich St., 30th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10013, (212) 816-0231, fax (212) 816-0799; also Matt Ripberger (212) 816-8309.

Roberta Walter

Merrill Lynch, World Financial Center, N. Tower, New York, N.Y. 10281, (212) 449-6782, fax (212) 449-3819.

Patricia Widner

Warburg Pincus, 466 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017, (212) 878-9378, fax (212) 878-9351.

KEY RESEARCHERS WHO STUDY MANAGED CARE AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

These people have researched how consumers use information in selecting managed care organizations.

Judith Hibbard, Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management, University of Oregon
(541) 346-3364, fax (541) 346-2040, e-mail: jhibbard@oregon.edu.

Steven Garfinkel, Research Triangle Institute
P.O. Box 12194, Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27709, (919) 541-6382, fax (919) 541-5945, e-mail: sag@rti.org.

James Lubalin, principal CAHPS cooperative agreement, Research Triangle Institute
1615 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 728-2041, fax: (202) 728-2095, e-mail: jsl@rti.org.

Shoshanna Sofaer, School of Public Affairs, Baruch College
17 Lexington Ave., Box F2021, New York, N.Y. 10010, (212) 802-5980, fax (212) 414-1615, e-mail: shoshannasofaer@baruch.cuny.edu.

KEY RESEARCHERS WHO STUDY HEALTH SERVICES, QUALITY, AND DELIVERY

Some of the best researchers in health care, they are excellent sources and usually available to the media.

Donald Berwick, president Institute for Healthcare Improvement
135 Francis St., Boston, Mass. 02115, (617) 754-4852, fax (617) 754-4848, e-mail: dberwick@ihi.org. Specialty: quality.

David Blumenthal, director Institute for Health Policy, Massachusetts General Hospital/Partners Health-Care System

50 Staniford St., Boston, Mass. 02114, (617) 724-4653, fax (617) 724-4738, e-mail: dblumenthal@partners.org. Specialty: quality.

Robert Brook, vice president RAND Corp.
P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, Calif. 90407, (310) 393-0411, ext. 7368, fax (310) 451-6917, Web site: www.rand.org, e-mail: robert_brook@rand.org. Specialty: quality.

Mark Chassin, chairman, department of health policy, Mt. Sinai School of Medicine
1 Gustave L. Levy Place, Box 1077, New York, N.Y. 10029, (212) 241-5379, fax (212) 423-2998, e-mail: mark_chassin@mtplink.mssm.edu. Specialty: quality.

Janet Corrigan, director of health care services division, Institute of Medicine
2101 Constitution Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20418, (202) 334-2165, fax (202) 334-1463, e-mail: jcorrigan@nas.edu. Specialty: quality and health services.

Arnold Epstein, chairman department of health policy and management, Harvard School of Public Health, Harvard University
677 Huntington Ave., Boston, Mass. 02115,

(617) 432-3415, fax (617) 432-3417, e-mail: aepstein@hsph.harvard.edu. Specialty: access to care.

Marsha Gold, senior fellow Mathematica Policy Research
600 Maryland Ave. S.W., Washington, D.C. 20024, (202) 484-4227 ext.4227, fax (202) 863-1763, e-mail: mgold@mathematica-mpr.com. Specialty: managed care systems and delivery.

Brent James, vice president for medical research, Intermountain Health Care
36 S. State St., Salt Lake City, Utah 84111, (801) 442-3730, fax (801) 442-3486, e-mail: bj@ihc.com. Specialty: quality.

Harold Luft, director of the Institute for Health Policy Studies, University of California, San Francisco
1388 Sutter St., San Francisco, Calif. 94109, (415) 476 5147, fax (415) 476-0705, e-mail: hlufth@itsa.ucsf.edu. Specialty: quality, health systems, and risk adjustment.

Elizabeth McGlynn, director center for research on quality in health care, RAND Corp.
P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, Calif. 90407, (310) 393-0411, ext.7411, Web site: www.rand.org, e-mail: mcglynn@rand.org. Specialty: quality.

Albert Siu, chief of the division of general internal medicine, Mt. Sinai Medical Center
Box 1087, New York, N.Y. 10029, (212) 241-4290, fax (212) 831-8116, e-mail: asiu@smtplink.mssm.edu. Specialty: quality.

LABOR UNIONS

Workers in organized labor have been members of managed care plans for a long time. Their unions keep track of problems and sometimes work with employers to develop innovative benefit packages.

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers
9000 Machinists Place, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20772, Web site: www.iamaw.org. Contact: director of strategic resources Stephen Sleigh (301) 967-4724, fax (301) 967-4583. Represents 500,000 workers. Has information on health costs and trends in collective bargaining that it is willing to share with reporters. Surveys members to assess their satisfaction with plans.

Service Employees International Union
1313 L St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 898-3200, fax (202) 898-3491, Web site: www.seiu.org. Press contacts: Jill Gallagher (202) 898-3330, Joni Ketter (202) 898-3374. Represents about 600,000 health care workers among 1.3 million federal and state employees. Makes available a number of studies on managed care issues.

United Auto Workers

8000 East Jefferson Ave., Detroit, Mich. 48214, (313) 926-5000, fax (313) 331-1520, Web site: www.uaw.org. Press contact: Reg McGhee (313) 926-5291; president Stephen Yokich. Union represents some 750,000 active workers and 550,000 retirees. Has worked actively with auto makers and other manufacturers to promote HMOs and other forms of managed care.

United Food and Commercial Workers

1775 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006, (202) 223-3111, fax (202) 466-1562, Web site: www.ufcw.org. Press contact: Greg Denier; director office of negotiated benefits David Blitzstein; president Douglas Dority. Union jointly administers health plans (with employers) for some 3 million people, including workers and their dependents. Has been at the forefront of pushing for cost-reduction measures.

MEDICAID AND MANAGED CARE

Efforts by states to move Medicaid recipients into managed care is a continuing story, and these organizations can help develop it.

Center for Health Care Strategies

353 Nassau St., Princeton, N.J. 08540, (609) 279-0700, fax (609) 279-0956, Web site: www.chcs.org. Communications officer Deborah Hornstra (609) 279-6117; president Stephen Somers. Supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Organization funds research and demonstration projects, and provides technical aid to state managed care organizations and health researchers.

The Commonwealth Fund

One East 75th St., New York, N.Y. 10021, (212) 535-0400, fax (212) 606-3500. Web site: www.cmwf.org, number for reporters: 800-472-4248. Public information officer Mary Mahon (212) 606-3853; president Karen Davis. A philanthropic organization that publishes some of the most authoritative studies around on Medicaid, managed care, and the uninsured. (See also "Medicare and Managed Care.")

Community Service Society

105 East 22 St., New York, N.Y. 10010, (212) 614-5401, fax (212) 614-9441, Web site: www.cssny.org. Contact: Chris Molnar. Conducts a Medicaid managed care project to provide information and skills for Medicaid recipients to navigate a managed care setting.

Health Care Financing Administration

7500 Security Blvd., Baltimore, Md. 21244, Web site: www.hcfa.gov. Government agency that oversees state Medicaid programs. Sally Richardson, director center for Medicaid and state operations, (410) 786-3870.

Health Resources and Services Administration, Center for Managed Care

REPORTING

5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, Md. 20857, (301) 443-1550, fax (301) 594-4984, Web site: www.hrsa.dhhs.gov/hrsa/mngd-care/cmc.htm. Contact: Rhoda Abrams, director (301) 594-4060. Government agency provides technical assistance to medical professionals who work with underserved populations.

Kaiser Family Foundation, Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured

1450 G St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 347-5270, fax (202) 347-5274, publications request number (800) 656-4533, Web site: www.kff.org. Communications officer Sara Knoll; commission director Diane Rowland; president Drew Altman. Commission publishes solid and reliable Medicaid fact sheets, chart books, and studies on Medicaid and managed care. (See also "Medicare and Managed Care.")

National Health Law Program

2639 S. Lacienga Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90034, (310) 204-6010, fax (310) 204-0891, Web site: www.healthlaw.org. Director Larry Lavin. A group that serves as an advocate for low income and disabled people and the elderly. Conducts training programs on Medicaid managed care and provides technical assistance to legal aid offices, professional associations, and advocacy groups.

National Academy for State Health Policy

50 Monument Square, Portland, Me. 04101, (207) 874-6524, fax (207) 874-6527, Web site: www.nasph.org. Director of Medicaid Managed Care Resource Center Neva Kaye; executive director Trish Riley. Can help journalists find state Medicaid officials to interview.

MEDICARE AND MANAGED CARE

Good sources, these organizations cover the entire range of issues from Medicare + Choice, the new array of options for beneficiaries, to problems beneficiaries have with managed care.

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

601 E St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20049, (202) 434-2277, fax (202) 434-2525, Web site: www.aarp.org. Communications director James Holland; media relations Gregory Marchild and Steve Hahn (202) 434-2560. Lobbies on behalf of thirty-two million members, aged 50 and older. Has extensive grassroots network and educational outreach activities. Supports Medicare + Choice with adequate options and choices. Offers publications dealing with Medicare and managed care.

The Commonwealth Fund

One East 75 St., New York, N.Y. 10021,

(212) 535-0400, fax (212) 606-3500, reporters number (800) 472-4248, Web site: www.cmf.org. Public information officer Mary Mahon (212) 606-3853; president Karen Davis. Releases many studies and lots of data on Medicare and managed care. Davis is one of the top experts on Medicare. (See also Medicaid and Managed Care.)

Health Care Financing Administration

7500 Security Blvd., Baltimore, Md. 21244, press office: (202) 690-6145, press officer Chris Peacock (202) 690-6149, Web site: www.hcfa.gov (for general information), www.medicare.gov (for health plan comparison information). Federal agency that administers Medicare. Carol Cronin, director center for beneficiary services (410) 786-2744; this center conducts the agency's educational campaigns and partners with Medicare advocacy groups. Dr. Robert Berenson, director center for health plans and providers (410) 786-4164; this center is responsible for the regulations affecting health plans. Dr. Jeffrey Kang, director of center for clinical standards and quality, which tries to establish quality guidelines for health plans.

The Georgetown University Institute for Health Care Research and Policy

2233 Wisconsin Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007, (202) 687-3026. Project director Geraldine Dallek is an expert on Medicare managed care regulations.

Kaiser Family Foundation

1450 G St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 347-5270, fax (202) 347-5274, publications request number (800) 656-4533, Web site: www.kff.org. Communications officer Sara Knoll; director of Medicare policy project Patricia Neuman. Has a number of fact sheets and studies about the Medicare program. (See also "Medicaid and Managed Care.")

Medicare Rights Center

1460 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036, (212) 869-3850, fax (212) 869-3532. Vice president Shirley Gazsi; executive director Diane Archer. Organization maintains a hot line for Medicare beneficiaries to call with problems. Disseminates *HMO Flash*, which details how Medicare and managed care works.

Research Triangle Institute

Box 12194, Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27709. Lauren McCormack, project leader Medicare evaluation: (919) 541-6277, fax (919) 541-6382, e-mail: lmacc@rti.org. Has conducted studies on aspects of Medicare.

SHIP Resource Center

1225 I St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 898-2578, fax (202) 898-2583. Director Bernice Hutchinson. Supported by the Health Care Financing Administration

and state health insurance and assistance programs, organization can give information on various state counseling programs for Medicare beneficiaries.

MENTAL HEALTH AND MANAGED CARE

There are strong feelings on this subject that involve practitioners' incomes, health plan profits, and patient care.

American Psychiatric Association

1400 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 682-6000, fax (202) 682-6255, Web site: www.psych.org. Director of public affairs John Blamphin; contact Melissa Saunders Katz (202) 682-6142. Represents 42,000 psychiatrists whose practices have been altered by managed care. Publishes a magazine, *Psychiatric Practice & Managed Care*.

American Psychological Association

750 1st St. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, (202) 336-5500, fax (202) 336-5708, Web site: www.apa.org. Public relations associate Tricia Alvarez; director of public relations and special projects Jan Peterson. Represents 155,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students. Supplies fact sheets and studies on legal and regulatory affairs, marketplace issues, and legislation.

American Managed Behavioral Health Association

700 13th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 434-4565, fax (202) 434-4564. Contact Pamela Greenberg, executive director. The association's members manage mental health benefits for employers and government health programs such as Medicaid and CHAMPUS.

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

200 North Glebe Rd., Arlington, Va. 22203, (703) 524-7600, fax (703) 524-9094. Web site: www.nami.org. Communications director Mary Rappaport; executive director Laurie Flynn. Organization monitors managed care from the perspective of those needing services for mental illness. Issued a report card on nine companies that manage mental health benefits. The report cards looked at such things as access to new medications, adherence to treatment guidelines, and family involvement.

National Coalition of Mental Health Professionals & Consumers, Inc.

Box 438, Commack, N.Y. 11725, (516) 424-5232, fax (516) 549-3942, e-mail: NCMHPC@aol.com, Web site: www.no-managedcare.org. Press contact: Michelle Curia Copoulos; president Karen Shore. Organization of professionals and consumers that dislikes managed care and believes it can't be fixed.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT DISSEMINATE HEALTH PLAN DATA

Their information is generally derived from satisfaction surveys, HEDIS performance measures (see glossary), and other data supplied by health plans. Some of the employer coalitions and purchasing groups also disseminate data through report cards they give to employees (see also "Employer Coalitions and Purchasing Groups").

Center for the Study of Services

733 15th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 347-7283, fax (202) 347-4000, Web site: www.checkbook.org. Public relations associate Dorothy Miller; president Robert Krughoff. Publishes "Consumers Guide to Health Plans" and "Guide to Health Insurance Plans for Federal Employees" based on satisfaction surveys of federal employees.

Consumer Reports

Publishes satisfaction data derived from surveys of Consumers Union members, publishes cost and benefit information on Medicare HMOs, and information about health plan quality improvement activities. Has also rated HMO coverage available to individuals who are not part of employer groups.

Health Care Financing Administration

Government agency will soon be distributing results of CAHPS (consumer assessment of health plans) survey of Medicare beneficiaries. HCFA may also disseminate HEDIS data, reporting performance measures that are specific to the Medicare population.

Health Pages

821 Broadway, 9th floor, New York, N.Y. 10003, (212) 505-0103, fax (212) 505-2546, Web site: www.thehealthpages.com, e-mail: hltphgs@bway.net. Publisher/editor Martin Schneider. Now affiliated with *Medical Economics*, a publication for doctors, Health Pages distributes a variety of data on health plans and health services incorporating surveys and HEDIS performance results. Some newspaper Web sites link to Health Pages data.

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

201 W. Preston St., Baltimore, Md. 21201, (410) 767-6490, fax (410) 333-7525. Director of public relations Tori Leonard; for report card information call John Colmers (401) 764-3460. Distributes report card on thirteen HMOs operating in the state, using HEDIS and consumer satisfaction data.

National Committee for Quality Assurance

2000 L St. NW, Washington D.C. 20036, (202) 955-3500, fax (202) 955-3599, Web site: www.ncqa.org. NCQA collects the Health Employer Data and Information Set

(HEDIS), which measures such things as preventive services, member satisfaction, and the number of procedures a plan performs. Releases the data in a product it sells called "Quality Compass." Not all plans allow NCQA to release their results.

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services

P.O. Box 360, Trenton, N.J. 08625, (609) 292-7837, fax (609) 633-0807, Web site: www.state.nj.us/health. Communications officer Rita Mano (609) 984-7160; research and development officer Frances Prestianni (609) 984-7914. Distributes report card on twelve HMOs operating in the state, using data from HEDIS and member satisfaction surveys.

Newsweek

Publishes annual evaluation of health plans using a combination of HEDIS measures and information gathered from questionnaires sent to HMOs.

Utah Department of Health

288 N. 1460 West, Salt Lake City, Utah 84114, (801) 538-6689, fax (801) 538-9916, Web site: www.healthdata.state.ut.us. Director of the office of health data analysis Denise Love; research director health data analysis Luis Paita. Publishes report card on four HMOs operating in the state using HEDIS and consumer satisfaction data.

Texas Office of Public Insurance Council

333 Guadalupe St., Austin, Tex. 78701, (512) 322-4143, fax (512) 322-4148, Web site: www.opic.state.tx.us. Contact: insurance counsel Rod Bordelon. Releases report cards on thirty-four HMOs in the state. Report card uses results of satisfaction surveys and notes consumer complaints.

U.S. News & World Report

Publishes an annual fall ranking of health plans using primarily HEDIS data obtained from NCQA.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT EVALUATE HMO FINANCIAL STABILITY

These organizations can give you a handle on financial aspects of individual HMOs.

A.M. Best

Ambest Road, Oldwick, N.J. 08858, (908) 439-2200, fax (908) 439-3363, Web site: www.ambest.com. Press contact: Jeff Dunsavage (908) 439-2200 ext. 5618. Rates the financial stability of 128 HMOs and publishes *Best's Managed Care Reports* and *Best's Aggregates & Averages — HMO*. Publications contain financial information about the companies.

Standard & Poor's

25 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10004, (212) 208-8000, Contact: managing director William O'Neill (212) 208-1367, fax (212) 412-0547. Rates the financial solvency of about 100 of the country's health care plans.

Best way for journalists to get up-to-date information on ratings is through the Insurance News Network, www.insure.com.

Weiss Ratings, Inc.

4176 Burns Rd., Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. 33410, (561) 627-3300, (800) 289-9222, fax (561) 625-6685. Contact: Elizabeth Kelley Grace (561) 989-9855. Evaluates 421 HMOs for financial solvency.

TRADE AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Trade associations exist to represent their members' economic interests. Journalists covering managed care need to know what those biases are. But many associations also have experts on their staffs who can give reasonably objective technical information about the particulars of legislation and other matters. Don't hesitate to seek them out.

Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy

100 North Pitt St., Alexandria, Va. 22314, (703) 683-8416, fax (703) 683-8417, Web site: www.amcp.org. Communications director Marlene Bloom; executive director Judith Cahill. Represents the views and interests of 4,500 pharmacists who work for some 600 managed care organizations or pharmacy benefit management companies. Has information on disease management and drug formularies (lists of drugs managed care organization will cover).

Alliance of Community Health Plans

100 Albany St., New Brunswick, N.J. 08901, (732) 220-1388, fax (732) 220-0298, Web site: www.achp.org. Vice president corporate communications William Rovner (732) 220-1388, ext. 28. Formerly known as The HMO Group, this association represents twenty-six not-for-profit managed care organizations and provider-sponsored health plans. It publishes white papers and newsletters discussing techniques members have used to improve health care.

American Association of Health Plans

1129 20th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 778-3200, fax (202) 331-7487. Web site: www.aahp.org. Vice president communications Susan Pisano 202-778-3245; president Karen Ignagni. The granddaddy of HMO trade associations, it lobbies on behalf of 1,000 managed care organizations. Makes available publications, including *Healthplan* magazine, policy analyses, and research papers on managed care. Can provide journalists with a list of state managed care trade associations.

American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging

901 E St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004, (202) 783-2242, fax (202) 783-2255, Web site: www.aahsa.org. Associate director public affairs Robert Greenwood, (202) 508-9475. Represents not-for-profit nurs-

REPORTING

ing homes. Their issues often intersect with managed care payment issues for Medicare beneficiaries. The association has been advocating return-to-home laws, which guarantee nursing home residents the right to return to the same facility after hospitalization.

American Association of Preferred Provider Organizations

1 Bridge Plaza, Ft. Lee, N.J. 07024, (201) 947-5545, fax (201) 947-8406, Web site: www.aappo.org. Executive director Brad Kalish. Represents about 80 percent of the country's 1,035 preferred provider organizations (PPOs). Publishes an annual report on PPOs.

American Health Quality Association

1140 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 331-5790, fax (202) 331-9334, Web site www.ahqa.org. Director of public affairs Laura Kaloi. This is a trade group of thirty-nine peer review organizations, or PROs, that contract with the Health Care Financing Administration to monitor the care received by Medicare beneficiaries and Medicaid recipients in managed care organizations as well as in fee-for-service settings.

American Hospital Association

325 Seventh St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004, (202) 638-1100, fax (202) 626-2255, Web site: www.aha.org. Communications director Etta Fielek; assistant director of media relations Alicia Mitchell; president Richard Davidson. Association represents 5000 hospitals and health networks. Publishes *Hospitals & Health Networks*, which often carries useful articles about managed care and the health care system.

American Medical Association

515 North State St., Chicago, Ill. 60610, (312) 464-5000, fax (312) 464-4184. Web site: www.ama-assn.org. Interim vice president Emerson Moran; news and information director Linda Stepanich (312) 464-2410; executive vice president E. Radcliffe Anderson Jr., M.D. The AMA represents 300,000 physicians. Publishes *American Medical News* that often gives clues to physicians' points of view on managed care.

American Nurses Association

600 Maryland Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20024, (202) 651-7027, fax (202) 651-7005, Web site: www.nursingworld.org. Communications director Joan Meehan; public relations specialist Michelle Slattery; president Beverly Malone. Represents 180,000 nurses. Has reports that assess the impact of managed care on nursing.

Blue Cross Blue Shield Association

225 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60601, (312) 297-6000, fax (312) 297-6609, Web site: www.bluecares.com. Director of media relations Chris Martin (312) 297-5523; manager of special projects, media relations Laura Ryan (312) 297-6161; president Ray-

mond McCaskey. Represents fifty-four organizations and offers the usual mix of fact sheets, news releases, legislative testimony, trend reports, and in-house experts on aspects of managed care.

Employers Managed Health Care Association

1299 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C., 20004, (202) 218-4121, fax (202) 842-0621. Executive director Pam Kalen, (202) 218-4121. An association of more than 100 health benefits managers from Fortune 500 companies. Members share tools such as "An Employers Guide to Medicare+ Choice Program," discuss how they use HEDIS data, and sponsor conferences on quality improvement.

Health Insurance Association of America

555 13th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004, (202) 824-1600, fax (202) 824-1660. Web site: www.hiaa.org. Communications director Richard Coorsh (202) 824-1787; president Charles Kahn. The major lobbying arm of the insurance industry, HIAA represents 269 insurance companies of all sizes. Has worked with the Health Benefits Coalition to defeat patient protection legislation and is pushing for an increase in federal reimbursement rates for Medicare HMOs. Opposes federal regulation of quality.

SELECTED READINGS

These readings will help journalists understand performance measurement, health care technology, and quality — issues that cut across all health care delivery systems, not just managed care.

Health Affairs July/August 1998 "Performance Measurement: Problems and Solutions" by David M. Eddy. A summary of the pitfalls in today's crop of managed care performance measurements. Journalists venturing into the ratings game should read this carefully. A provocative series of "commentary" pieces from experts on medical quality follows.

News & Numbers: A guide to reporting statistical claims and controversies in health and other fields, by Victor Cohn. Iowa State University Press, 1989. Any journalist on the health beat should read or reread this classic on the traps lurking in the reportage of numbers and statistics.

"The Urgent Need to Improve Health Care Quality" by Mark Chassin, Robert W. Galvin and the National Roundtable on Health Care Quality. *Journal of the American Medical Association* September 16, 1998. An excellent presentation of the quality problems facing not only managed care but all of American medicine. A must-read.

Demanding Medical Excellence: Doctors and

National Business Coalition on Health 1015 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 775-9300, fax (202) 775-1569, Web site: www.nbch.org. Vice president Catherine Kunkle. Founded in 1992, the group represents ninety-one employer coalitions. Focuses on value-based purchasing and tries to change incentives in the health system to promote market-based reform.

Pharmaceutical Care Management Association

2300 9th St. South, Arlington, Va. 22204, (703) 920-8480, fax (703) 920-8491. Media coordinator Kathleen Pennington; president Delbert Konnor. Represents health insurance companies, pharmacy benefit management companies, HMOs, PPOs, third party administrators, pharmaceutical manufacturers, community pharmacy networks, and drug wholesalers. Lobbies on their behalf and promotes managed care pharmacy.

The Health Benefits Coalition

600 Maryland Ave. S.W., Washington, D.C. 20024, (202) 554-9000, fax (202) 484-1566, Web site: www.hbcweb.com. Chairman Dan Danner. Group was formed in early 1998 to oppose federal health care mandates, including the patients' bill of rights, which Congress may consider this year.

accountability in the information age by Michael L. Millenson. The University of Chicago Press 1997. Written by a former health reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, using anecdotes and stories, this book explores the problems in all sectors of medicine.

Health Against Wealth: HMOs and the breakdown of medical trust by George Anders. Houghton Mifflin 1996. *Wall Street Journal* reporter Anders takes a rather negative view of managed care, exploring the problems patients have had getting care. He offers recommendations for improvement.

Beginnings Count: The technological imperative in American health care by David J. Rothman. A Twentieth Century Fund Book, Oxford University Press 1997. Good historical background on technology in American medicine and how the middle class embrace of technology has had a powerful influence on health care reform.

"As Good As It Should Get: Making Health Care Better in the New Millennium" by Donald Berwick, M.D. September 1998. A report released by the National Coalition on Health Care that discusses quality improvement activities of a number of health care systems. Good for understanding the quality improvement process.

RATING THE RECRUITS

How does the recent crop of newcomers to journalism shape up, compared with their predecessors?

A COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW SURVEY IN CONJUNCTION WITH PUBLIC AGENDA

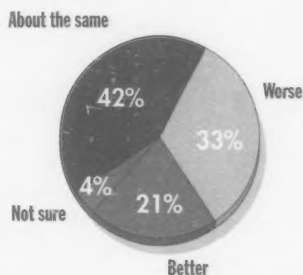
BY NEIL HICKEY

How tough is it for newspapers, magazines, and TV news organizations to recruit talented, committed youngsters eager to launch a career in journalism? Have recent aspirants been more promising — or less — than those of years past? Do they bring more useful technical skills and training — or less — than earlier generations of applicants?

Every manager of a news operation faces the ongoing task of assuring the quality and effectiveness of his staff into the future. Each year, tens of thousands of young people enter the journalism job market — more than 30,000 from graduate and undergraduate J-schools alone. Many are eager to make a difference in the society, and to experience the glamour, travel, rewards, and fame that often mark successful journalists' careers.

To learn how editors and news directors around the country feel about the recent crop of newcomers, the *Columbia Journalism Review*, with the nonprofit, nonpartisan research firm Public Agenda, collected opinions from 125 such senior journalists. The responses were not-for-attribution, but roughly three-

Overall, would you say that the quality of people now entering journalism is better or worse than it was in the past, say ten years ago or so?



quarters included brief, explanatory remarks on their questionnaires, and almost four out of ten agreed to follow-up telephone interviews.

Eighty percent of our panel have been in journalism for twenty years or more. Eighteen percent have ten to nineteen years of service, and only 2 percent have been at the trade for one to nine years.

The poll turned up some fascinating — as well as troubling — results. Compared with ten years or so ago:

■ A third of the sample is convinced that the quality of young people entering

journalism is worse than it was then. Only a fifth think it's better and 42 percent say it's about the same.

- Fully two-thirds believe that newcomers have less knowledge of public affairs than their predecessors.
- More than half believe they have less writing talent.
- 57 percent think they have less motivation and willingness to work.
- 43 percent say the neophytes have less ability to recognize a good story.

But there's positive news as well. A hefty percentage (49 percent) say the newcomers have greater general intelligence than applicants of the past. Only 20 percent say it's lower. And more than six out of ten feel that the recent arrivals display better technical skills and professional training.

But overall, it's "harder than ever" to find talented new journalists, according to 57 percent of the panel. A bare 10 percent think it's easier. Almost a third say the task is about the same as it always has been.

NOTE: PERCENTAGES FOR ALL CHARTS MAY NOT EQUAL 100% BECAUSE OF MULTIPLE RESPONSES OR ROUNDING. SURVEY RESULTS BASED ON RESEARCH BY CJR AND PUBLIC AGENDA.

Neil Hickey is CJR's editor at large.



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CJR POLL

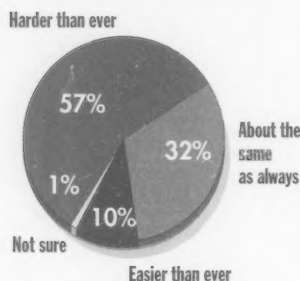
NO PRINCIPLES OR STANDARDS?

In the survey, we asked respondents to write comments on why they think the quality of people now entering journalism has changed. Many lament that the postulants arrive lacking in any broad familiarity with important issues of the day.

"They have no idea what is required of working journalists," says Forrest Carr, news director of KGUN-TV, Tucson, Arizona. "They don't know how to write in the style we require. They don't know how to conduct an interview or work a beat. They know nothing about ethics or legal issues or privacy rights. They draw a blank on current events."

Jerry Bohnen, news director of KTOX Radio in Oklahoma City, echoes that sentiment. Lack of "grammatical, historical, and governmental preparation at the high school level" is one big problem, he insists. "The prospective

At your organization, would you say that recruiting talented new journalists is:



journalists don't understand government. They lack historical insight — and feel if it didn't happen during their lifetime they shouldn't be expected to know about it." Most have "extremely good technical knowledge" of computers, video, and audio equipment, he says, but can't write the language with any real facility.

Says Chris Willcox, editor-in-chief of *Reader's Digest*: "Core curriculum is non-existent, and many young people no longer have a basic grasp of history, literature, and political economy." Thomas Mitchell, editor, Las Vegas, Nevada, *Review-Journal*, puts his view baldly: They have "no firmly-held principles or ethical standards."

"THE BEST ARE BETTER"

Others assess the situation quite differently:

■ "Young folks these days have more general knowledge, maturity, and compassion than those of a few years ago." — Louise Seals, managing editor, Richmond, Virginia, *Times-Dispatch*

■ "The best people are much better." — Jim Ogle, vice president, news, WKYT-TV, Lexington, Kentucky

■ "College journalism grads are much more skilled in gathering and sorting information than those of ten years ago." — Constance Lloyd, director of news operations, CBS Radio News.

Overall, the quality is higher, one respondent says, but the newcomers' skills tend to be more technical than editorial; and the numbers of eager applicants are dropping, "particularly among kids of color." Says another: "The quality is better because many know they won't get rich, and want to be journalists in order to make a difference." Several panelists detect that this generation is better educated, with more facts and skills at hand, but think that the fledglings have suffered by exposure to the "tabloid disease." One editor says simply: "The best of the group are better than ever, the worst are worse than ever."

PASSION — AND FIRE IN THE BELLY

There's considerable worry that the newcomers aren't as fervently motivated as their predecessors. Says Mary de Wet, copy desk chief, Cheyenne, Wyoming, *Tribune-Eagle*: "It's hard to find young journalists with 'fire in their bellies.' Journalism is just a job to them." David Bauer, managing editor, Bowling Green, Kentucky, *Daily News*, wonders "how do you mandate or build passion and fire for a craft? It's hard to do, and money is not a panacea." At *The Miami Herald*, executive editor Douglas Clifton muses: "Maybe it's my age, but I think there may be a difference in the work ethic. Why? Expectations are higher; willingness to pay the price is lower." And Ellie Dixon, managing editor at the St. Johnsbury, Vermont, *Caledonian*

Record, discerns less "enthusiasm and zest" for the job. "Instead, pay rates, hours, and benefits are the priorities."

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ABOUT THE CJR POLL

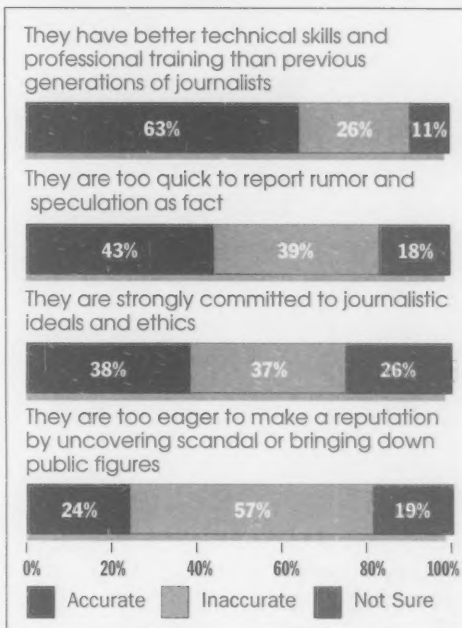
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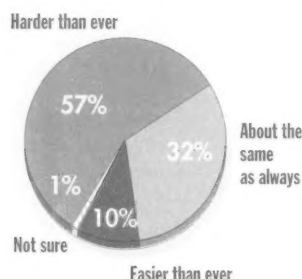
NO PRINCIPLES OR STANDARDS?

In the survey, we asked respondents to write comments on why they think the quality of people now entering journalism has changed. Many lament that the postulants arrive lacking in any broad familiarity with important issues of the day.

"They have no idea what is required of working journalists," says Forrest Carr, news director of KGUN-TV, Tucson, Arizona. "They don't know how to write in the style we require. They don't know how to conduct an interview or work a beat. They know nothing about ethics or legal issues or privacy rights. They draw a blank on current events."

Jerry Bohnen, news director of KTOK Radio in Oklahoma City, echoes that sentiment. Lack of "grammatical, historical, and governmental preparation at the high school level" is one big problem, he insists. "The prospective

At your organization, would you say that recruiting talented new journalists is:



journalists don't understand government. They lack historical insight — and feel if it didn't happen during their lifetime they shouldn't be expected to know about it." Most have "extremely good technical knowledge" of computers, video, and audio equipment, he says, but can't write the language with any real facility.

Says Chris Willcox, editor-in-chief of *Reader's Digest*: "Core curriculum is non-existent, and many young people no longer have a basic grasp of history, literature, and political economy." Thomas Mitchell, editor, Las Vegas, Nevada, *Review-Journal*, puts his view baldly: They have "no firmly-held principles or ethical standards."

'THE BEST ARE BETTER'

Others assess the situation quite differently:

■ "Young folks these days have more general knowledge, maturity, and compassion than those of a few years ago."

— Louise Seals, managing editor, Richmond, Virginia, *Times-Dispatch*

■ "The best people are much better." — Jim Ogle, vice president, news, WKYT-TV, Lexington, Kentucky

■ "College journalism grads are much more skilled in gathering and sorting information than those of ten years ago." — Constance Lloyd, director of news operations, CBS Radio News.

Overall, the quality is higher, one respondent says, but the newcomers' skills tend to be more technical than editorial; and the numbers of eager applicants are dropping, "particularly among kids of color." Says another: "The quality is better because many know they won't get rich, and want to be journalists in order to make a difference." Several panelists detect that this generation is better educated, with more facts and skills at hand, but think that the fledglings have suffered by exposure to the "tabloid disease." One editor says simply: "The best of the group are better than ever, the worst are worse than ever."

PASSION — AND FIRE IN THE BELLY

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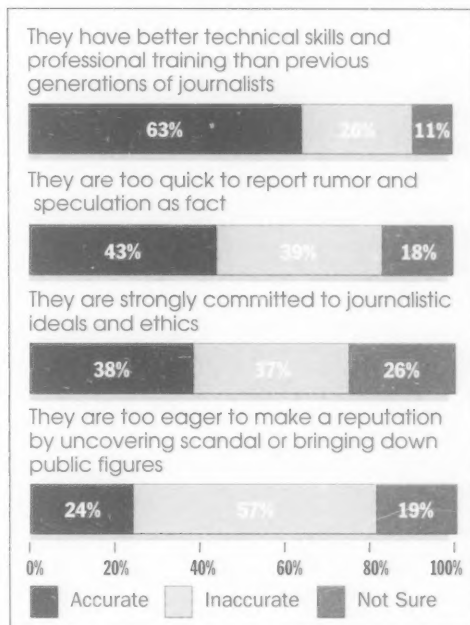
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NO LONGER JUST SEX DRUGS AND ROCK 'N' ROLL

The alternative weeklies go mainstream — and thrive

BY KEVIN McAULIFFE

"This is our dream job. We're doing what we got into this business to do. You won't hear any focus-group-generated gloom from us about no one reading newspapers anymore. What a crock!" — Michael Lacey, co-owner, New Times Corporation

By virtually any measure, these are good times for the alternative newspaper industry — starting with the fact that it is now recognized as an industry, and a \$400 million-a-year one at that. It's been a long while since alternative papers were called "underground." The increasingly preferred term of choice

Kevin McAuliffe, a free-lance writer and media consultant, is author of The Great American Newspaper, a history of the early years of The Village Voice.

today is a simple "weeklies," thank you. Numbers are up — the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies (AAN) counts 113 members. So are readers — to an average of 6.9 million a week throughout the U.S. and Canada. So are ad revenues — \$383 million in 1997 was nearly double the 1992 numbers, with \$420 million projected for 1998. All these AAN figures are record highs. And at the association's most recent national convention in Washington, judging panels packed with what once might have been scorned as "big-name mainstream media heavies" were on hand to bestow awards on its members.

Sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll, revolution — the original driving forces behind the alternatives — have given way to a kind of 1968 Lite. What were once "counter-culture" newspapers now are defining the culture — a testament to their success. The entertainment industry treats them as a showcase. Their latter-day



NEW TIMES CORPORATION: owners Michael Lacey, top, and James Larkin

political outlook tends to be just left enough to be cutting edge, yet not nearly so antiestablishment as to lose touch with important advertisers. It's in the ad columns — not editorial — where sex is prominent these days. Most alternatives, except in the Bible Belt, run sex-related personal classifieds, as well as ads bought by phone sex promoters and prostitutes.

The alternatives have done more than just establish themselves as a permanent force. They've captured the allegiance of a generation that's shunning both daily newspapers and network television for all-news channels or the Internet. They've discovered they can thrive by going to free distribution, and they're one of the few branches of print media that is growing — and that can

PHOTOS BY SARA BARRETT

look forward to the twenty first century with confidence.

One major clue that the alternatives are capturing the niche — and following the growth pattern — of the dailies in their prime: a war has erupted between rival alternative chains that have both gone national at the same time.

In this corner, ladies and gentlemen: New Times Corporation, whose owners James Larkin, 49, and Michael Lacey, 50, have cultivated a brash outsider image, steadily expanded their reach from their original Phoenix base, and recently stepped up their pace — their purchase of *Riverfront Times* in September making that St. Louis paper the tenth link in their chain. And in this corner: Stern Publishing Company of New York, behind whose *Village Voice* flagship sails a fleet of six other weeklies, some bought, others launched.

In two cities — Los Angeles and now Cleveland — the chains compete head to head. In at least three cities, they have also gone toe to toe, bidding to buy the same paper. Other collisions may come, as more proprietors of alternatives see their chance for a cash-out “exit strategy” after years of toil and financial struggle.

The competitors are not unwilling to talk a little trash about each other. “*The Village Voice* is mired in sixties clenched-fist journalism,” scoffs New Times’s Lacey. “Show me a *Voice* story and within two paragraphs I can tell you where it’s going, and what the writer’s political orientation is.” David Schneiderman, Stern president and *Voice* publisher, just smiles. “We are quietly aggressive. We whipped them in Los Angeles, and we’re going to do the same thing across the country. It’s always fun to compete against somebody who says, ‘I want to eat your lunch.’”

So far, the only major fallout from having two powerful nationwide chains in competition has been an infusion of owners’ funds to strengthen local staffs and coverage — with no loss of local control. About that, no one is complaining. “If it’s good journalism, it doesn’t matter who owns the paper. I’ve seen lots of independently owned alternatives that were terrible compared to the chains,” says Patricia Calhoun of Denver’s *Westword*, still happily at the helm some fifteen years after her paper became the first Larkin-Lacey acquisition. Almost everyone interviewed for this article repeated in some form, with almost Manchurian Candidate-like pre-

cision, the David Schneiderman maxim that “chains are as good or bad as the people running them.”

There hasn’t been a case where a national chain pulled the journalistic equivalent of a Wal-Mart, invading a new market and driving a local independent weekly out of business. “That would be the line in the sand,” says Abe Peck, a veteran alternative journalist who is a journalism professor at Northwestern. But that day may be coming closer. In Seattle and Minneapolis, after a bidding contest that involved both Stern and New Times, the New York chain wound up owning two papers in each city — and closing one. And last July, New Times bought its Houston rival — in order to shut down that paper.

Each case involved layoffs, and obviously rivalries can turn destructive — depriving journalists of their livelihoods and denying readers their favorite outlets. “I like to see more voices, not fewer,” says Peck of the closings. “Also, chains take away one of the shields that alternative papers like to carry into battle against dailies — ‘they’re rapacious, they’re corporate-owned.’ You can still make that case, but it’s harder.”

Says Richard Karpel, executive director of AAN: “When a chain buys an alternative paper, the obvious danger is losing what made the paper worthwhile in the first place. You need that sense of intimacy with your readers, those ragged edges.” So far, Karpel sees no signs of that in either the Stern or New Times expansion (“it’s not leading to Gannettization”), and the increased competition among alternatives has been healthy. (With the chains’ growth, most major markets now have more than one weekly.) But there may be limits. Over the long haul, Karpel says, “it’s difficult for a large company to maintain a culture of independence” — and not just in its relationship with its own papers. If the chain goes public, the threat of its papers’ becoming “too profit-driven” — or the owners losing control — looms. And the chains themselves could be bought out, leaving those local papers in the hands of owners they never chose to sell to.

Well, now that the era of “chain alternative journalism” is here, how do you tell the chains apart? One analyst of the industry puts it this way: “New Times

tends to be more centralized. When they buy a paper, they have a holistic strategy. There’s a strong editorial vision coming out of Phoenix. You can see a little bit of Mike Lacey in each paper. The New Times papers look similar. The Stern papers tend to be more haphazard — no central strategy.”

New Times had its origins on the campus of Arizona State University amid the May 1970 student protests against Kent State and Cambodia. From there, the paper morphed into a slick, sophisticated weekly covering the Phoenix metro area and establishing a reputation for hip liveliness and tough investigative reporting. It made the right enemies — prominent among them: the state’s disgraced ex-Governor Fife Symington (whom it helped bring down). Lacey (the editorial vision) and Larkin (the business end) were a good team. “We’re so surprised that we found a way to make a living,” quips Lacey. Says Larkin, only half-jokingly: “We really like the

STERN PUBLISHING COMPANY:
Leonard Stern



newspaper business. We can cause trouble — and have a lot of fun.”

Larkin insists there’s no rivalry with the Stern papers, but then notes, “We’ve been in this business a lot longer than he has” and “all our money is generated from the newspaper business” — a sly dig at the \$1-billion-plus fortune Leonard Stern compiled as top dog of Hartz Mountain, the pet-products maker, which enabled Stern to enter publishing by taking the *Voice* off Rupert Murdoch’s hands in the mid-80s. By then, Larkin and Lacey had made their first

A SAMPLING OF WEEKLIES FROM AROUND THE NATION

Name	Circulation	Founded	Owner	Descriptions: Adapted from AAN Web site
New York Press	110,000	1988	Russ Smith	"First-person reminiscences, fiction, weekly examinations of the culture of publishing, media, sports. America's only right-wing rock critic. Showcases some of area's best illustrators."
Village Voice	247,502	1955	Stern Publishing Co.	"Nation's first and largest alternative newsweekly. No-holds barred reporting and incisive criticism. Groundbreaking investigations. Opinionated arts reviews."
Westword (Denver)	108,000	1977	New Times Corp.	"Delivering the straight story to yet another generation of young adults lured by Denver's climate, scenery, and the country's highest concentration of microbreweries."
Philadelphia City Paper	112,000	1981	Montgomery Newspapers	"The city's leading newsweekly. The 'must-read' for active young adults (18-45). Delivers a powerfully presented and award-winning news, entertainment, and listings package — just in time for the weekend."
Seattle Weekly	110,000	1976	Stern Publishing Co.	"Winner of the 1998 SPJ Sweepstakes Award for best non-daily in the region. Whether investigating public subsidies for software billionaires or challenging a major museum to return stolen Nazi art, the weekly's regional impact is always unmistakable."
The Stranger (Seattle)	76,000	1991	Loaded Forbear	"Smart, funny, innovative, a trendsetter. Specializes in literary journalism and bold design. A gutsy, irreverent approach to the news, the arts, the city."
Texas Observer	5,000	1954	Texas Democracy Foundation	"A 'Journal of Free Voices.' The state's only source of independent, progressive journalism. National media look to the <i>Observer</i> for regional stories with national impact."
Boston Phoenix	115,000	1966	Stephen Mindich	"New England's largest weekly, combining the depth of a magazine with the immediacy of a newspaper. Winner of a 1994 Pulitzer for classical music criticism."
Chicago Reader	137,000	1971	Chicago Reader, Inc.	"A pioneer of the weekly alternative press, with a unique four-section format, offering award-winning features, columns, and cartoons, plus coverage of Chicago's huge club and concert scene."
Washington City Paper	96,000	1981	Washington Free Weekly, Inc.	"A relentless emphasis on local Washington, the definitive local guide to cultural and civic life. A strong commitment to the watchdog role of the alternative press."
New Times Los Angeles	120,000	1996	New Times Corp.	"A source for stories behind the glitter of Hollywood and the grit of downtown politics. Its brand of investigative writing provokes even the most reclusive Angeleno."
L.A. Weekly	220,000	1978	Stern Publishing Co.	"The largest urban newsweekly in the western United States. Seeks out the newest and most provocative articles, photos, and illustrations defining the world's most exciting and burgeoning city."
Santa Fe Reporter	25,000	1974	Stern Publishing Co.	"Lively competition to a stodgy and timid daily press. Its hallmark: vigorous, reliable coverage of local issues and politicians."
S.F. Weekly	120,000	1984	New Times Corp.	"Has challenged massive public subsidies for private developments and blamed liberal political advocates for inhumane jail conditions. An array of public interest journalism."
Bay Guardian (S.F.)	153,000	1966	Bruce Brugmann	"Offers the educated and affluent local market a competitive alternative to the moribund daily newspaper monopoly."
Phoenix New Times	132,000	1970	New Times Corp.	"Regularly dominates Arizona Press Club contests; an unparalleled source for info on politics, business, arts, and entertainment."

New Times papers share a basic matrix. Masthead in Gothic type. One — just one — major muckraking cover feature or profile per issue, followed by reams of breezy culture coverage and the inevitable onslaught (common to alternatives everywhere) of personal and sex-industry ads. But Lacey is quick

This infusion of resources has been a key element in the New Times editorial mix. Another is a conspicuous lack of political ideology. "We've been at it for so long," says Lacey, "that to us the people on the left are as full of shit as the people on the right." Adds Larkin, "We have a goal when we buy a paper — to improve it. I don't care what the politics of the editor or the managing editor are. We're very hands-on, and we have a goal in mind. But it's a journalism goal, not a politics goal."

system in Colorado — stories that other alternative papers, given their origins in the “Movement” and prevailing concerns about political correctness, might well have shied away from. The posture is probably in sync with where Generation Xers and many aging baby boomers are coming from politically these days.

But it incenses Bruce Brugmann, whose *Bay Guardian* has been battling Larkin and Lacey's *SF Weekly* for five years (successfully) in the Bay Area and who emits a full-throated roar of true-believer disdain for their product. "They try to attack us — but all they do is improve us," Brugmann says. "It's never clear what their politics are, what their political and cultural agenda is. We've been here thirty years. This is still a liberal city, and we're not afraid to say we're liberals. We believe in San Francisco fanny-whacking journalism. I don't know what they believe in."

David Schneiderman, sitting in his top-floor offices at *The Village Voice*, is far more cautious and restrained when the subject of competition with the Larkin-Lacey chain comes up — but no less determined to win it. In Stern's successful bids for papers in Seattle and

CJR on the World Wide Web

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NEWSPAPERS

Minneapolis, he notes with satisfaction, "It's rumored that we paid less than they put on the table. These papers preferred to sell to Stern. Also, we pay in cash and we close fast, while New Times has to borrow." (It was New Times, however, that came up the winner in the bidding for St. Louis' lucrative *Riverfront Times*.)

A former *New York Times* op-ed page editor, Schneiderman became a *Voice* executive during the paper's Rupert Murdoch era two decades ago. Under current owner Leonard Stern, who bought the *Voice* in 1985, he was not only kept on, but given day-to-day control

over all Stern publications. That list has been growing rapidly since the purchase of *L.A. Weekly* in 1995. "Leonard had started thinking about expanding almost as soon as he bought the *Voice*," says Schneiderman, "but there wasn't anything for sale until then. And we don't believe in big strategic plans." In fact, Stern's first steps were in reverse — closing the *Voice's* ill-fated national edition (introduced under the disastrous 1974-77 Clay Felker regime) and his own *Seven Days* (with a reported loss of \$20 million). But, after that, growth came fast — with successful suburban satellite ver-

CITIBANK AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

The Citibank Award for Excellence in Journalism is a mark of professionalism and accomplishment for business journalists around the world. Now in its 18th year, the program has recognized 215 journalists from more than 110 media in 31 countries.

Selected by independent juries, journalists participate in a 12-day educational seminar in New York and Washington, D.C., organized by the Department of Continuing Education and Special Programs at Columbia University and sponsored by Citibank.

Created in 1982 for journalists from Latin America, the program has since expanded to Asia, Africa, Eastern and Western Europe and North America.

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ALTERNATIVE

Even as Leonard Stern's publishing empire prepares for battle across the country, it's fighting a rearguard action on its home turf.

The challenger: Russ Smith, 43. He grew up on suburban Long Island, reading the *Voice* in its free-form heyday under laid-back editor Dan Wolf, a man Smith never met but continues to idolize and emulate. One big difference: after co-founding the Baltimore and Washington *City Papers* and paying himself \$50 per week, only to be subjected to a colonoscopic audit by the Internal Revenue Service, Smith marched into the camp of the political right.

He and his partner sold their papers for a nice profit in 1987. Smith traveled, looking for his next start-up opportunity, thought about London, then decided to come home. To New York. To the *Voice*. Not to work for it — but to drive it crazy.

By that time, the *Voice* viewpoint — after years of turmoil, staff departures, and corporate takeovers — had hardened into screechy, stale, knee-jerk leftism. Founding editor Wolf was among those who no longer even read the paper. Smith decided to get the *Voice's* attention.

Eleven years later, his *New York Press* has definitely succeeded in that. Since turning the corner into the black in 1996, Smith has firmly established New York as a two-weekly town — providing an alternative to the grand-daddy of all the alternatives, challenging the *Voice* for readers and even its birthright.

"All the *Voice* has left is the franchise," Smith says, leisurely chain-smoking in his midtown Seventh Avenue offices after an issue has been put to bed. "They're still in a '70s time-warped editorially. If you're a writer, you have to pass a political litmus test. Your piece gets thrown into the blender or they don't print it. A dance review has to include a mention of Hegel or Kant. The *Voice* has underestimated us from day one. We shoot from the trees like the Viet

STORY: THE BATTLE IN NEW YORK

Cong. We aren't afraid to take chances."

That is an understatement. Smith himself sets the tone for each issue with his column, "Mugger," that sprawls over the front of the paper, free-associatively plugging

his likes and machine-gunning whatever (or whom-ever) bugs him that week. The content: neo-con, right-wing, impeach-the-bastard. The tone: wired, totally uninhibited, often scatological. The overall effect: Camille Paglia meets Hunter Thompson. The result: outrageous, bodaciously politically-incorrect (especially for liberal New York) and frequently hilarious.

Smith balances his own views with those of columnists like British Marxist Alexander Cockburn and *The Nation's* David Corn. He invites dialogue by printing lots of long letters from readers, stirs in contributions from Wolf-era *Voice* writers such as Lucian Truscott and Clark Whelton and — voilà — the result is a conscious attempt to replicate the "writer's paper" atmosphere and attitude of the early *Voice* for the age of cyberspace. All opinions, all the time.

"I can put whatever I want in my paper," says Smith, an engaging man definitely not bereft of self-confidence. "It hurts the feelings of the theater writers when I say this, but I know that the entertainment listings and the sex ads are why 75 percent of our audience reads us; only 25 percent read the articles. That means I can print stories that are very arcane but well-researched, stories that catch another 2 percent of the audience. And those people become readers." From the first, Smith took the risk of a down-market stigma and distributed his paper free — a risk that has paid off in a solid circulation base of 110,000. In 1996, the *Voice* followed suit. "The main difference between us and Leonard Stern," he jibes at the opposition, "is that this is a sideline venture

for Stern. He's made a ton of money. This is a cocktail business for him. He's not a newspaperman. We're newspapermen."

If Smith is the right-wing rogue in this play, then *Voice* publisher David Schneiderman, 51, is the earnest, low-key liberal who refuses to be rattled. In his two decades at *The Voice* Schneiderman has seen it all — changes of ownership, moves to new buildings, staff revolts, editors hired and ousted. He has proved not only a survivor who maintains his



David Schneiderman, left, of *The Village Voice* and Russ Smith of the *New York Press*

equanimity but a canny publishing executive who has skillfully maneuvered the paper into its strongest position in years.

With the departure in 1996 of Karen Durbin as editor, Schneiderman brought in Don Forst, an old pro from the late *New York Newsday* who has tightened the paper and toughened its local hard-news reporting. Since the shift to free distribution in 1996 (a move Schneiderman concedes was partly motivated by competition from the *Press*), circulation has risen nearly 70 percent to an all-time high of 247,000 — still a better than two-to-one ratio in the *Voice's* favor over its rival. And the mainstay of its advertising base — its classified section, particularly for vacant downtown apartments — continues to be the paper's unsailable ace in the hole. There is even labor peace on the horizon after recent settlements with its unions. "I've

grown to love the place," says Schneiderman.

But the years and the upheavals have taken their toll. Though the *Voice* can still boast some marquee names in New York journalism — essayist Nat Hentoff, investigative reporter Wayne Barrett, columnist Michael Musto, critic Michael Feingold — a new paper could practically be started just with those who have left in recent years: columnists Jack Newfield and Joe Conason, cartoonist Jules Feiffer, political reporter Michael Tomasky, film maven Andrew Sarris, literary critic James Wolcott, and Cockburn. After years of being ideologically predictable, the paper still has not recaptured that cutting edge of fearless iconoclasm it once had. Unless there is even more turnover on the staff (now locked in by unionization), it may never. Whatever else may be said, the *Press* is the liveliest newspaper.

In the meantime, both papers appear here to stay, and are competing accordingly — which can only benefit readers. In August, the *Press* went to an unusual half-broadsheet format — a full-size front section with a tabloid listings insert. "A pro-active move to distinguish ourselves in the marketplace," says Smith of his paper's tactic.

Schneiderman, spinning dismissively: "I think they very clearly have a problem now with writers writing much longer articles." At the same time, the *Voice* also got a slightly new look — smaller pages, more of them (up to 200), more color.

Then, in November, the *Press* ran a page one story accusing the *Voice* of predatory advertising practices designed to run it out of business. The *Press* also trumpeted a "financial crisis" at its rival, allegedly triggered by massive cost overruns accompanied by "staff unrest" over austerity measures. The *Voice* denied everything. And so the sniper warfare continues.

K.M.

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NEWSPAPERS

sions of his Los Angeles and New York papers (*Orange County Weekly*, *Long Island Voice*) and buy-ups of *Seattle Weekly*, *Minneapolis City Pages*, and Cleveland's *Free Times* in 1996-97. (As part of the Seattle deal, Stern also bought that city's *Eastside-week*, and folded it. And in a follow-up deal in Minneapolis, he bought — and folded — *City Pages*'s longtime local rival, the *Reader*.)

Schneiderman says he manages the Stern portfolio of seven papers very closely from the business side. But editorially, he acknowledges that, yes, "I want each paper to reflect the individuality of the staff



and the city. I can't imagine a cookie-cutter approach working. I want our papers to be idiosyncratic, but all under one roof. The last thing in the world I want them to do is copy each other. I don't want them to have to worry about being second-guessed."

Stern intends to continue expansion, though plans are vague — possibly a daily newspaper at some point. But, Schneiderman muses, it's easier to compete against another free-distribution weekly than against a monopoly daily. The target audience is quite distinct. Weeklies are succeeding, Schneiderman believes, because they offer "the kind of editorial and cultural coverage that a lot of young readers want."

What happens to a local editor whose paper gets bought out by an alternative chain? So far, not much. At least no purges or force-fed "national" features imposed by faraway ownership. In Denver, *Westword*'s Patricia Calhoun says of Larkin and Lacey, "All they've done is give me a great budget for editorial and let me do my work." In St. Louis, as he awaited the New Times takeover, *Riverfront Times* editor Safir Ahmed said he wasn't worried. "Local independent or chain, you have to look for a financial commitment to the editorial product. Sadly, that's lacking in many alternative papers. Owners can't

Westword

afford it. But Larkin and Lacey's papers are among the best in the business. They consider their primary mission to be local stories. When their Phoenix paper did a piece on exploitation of maquiladora workers, that story did not run in their Texas papers, though a national chain could cut costs by doing that."

Likewise, Knute "Skip" Berger, hired by Schneiderman to return as editor of the *Seattle Weekly* after Stern bought it, is the first to concede that his paper's "old editorial formula was out of energy. We needed new dynamics" — which Stern has supplied in the form of money, technology upgrades, and editorial freedom to pursue investigative reporting against some of Seattle's most sacred cows (Microsoft, Boeing, Nordstrom, Weyerhaeuser among them). "We're less elitist, more populist now." On the other hand, says

Berger, "We do things here the *Voice* would never do. Our tone is different. I even have a pair of right-wing media critics. I don't feel any pressure." Indeed, Leonard Stern's own management style vis-à-vis his papers' editorial tone, is described variously by insiders as hands-off, aloof, laid-back, stand-offish, non-interventionist.

Ahmed in St. Louis has one lingering apprehension about the sale of *Riverfront Times*. "This town will be a test for New Times. Most of the papers they bought were much smaller and they made them bigger and better. We're already big" — 100,000 circulation and a 120-page average. In Seattle, Berger misses *Eastside-week* — where he was editor when it was bought as part of the *Seattle Weekly* package deal. "From a business standpoint, it was right" for Stern to close the paper, he knows. "But from a journalistic point of view, I was frustrated with it."

Then there's the issue of, ahem, transition: What happens when the chain owners themselves die or decide to sell? New Times and Schneiderman are, on this point, in total agreement: these chains will not change hands. Indeed,

the next Stern, Lacey, and Larkin generations are already working in the business, apparently eager to be groomed for eventual succession. Typically, the New Times entrepreneurs are a bit more blunt and irreverent about this issue. Larkin: "This is all we have done with our lives. We don't go fly-fishing. There's no financial pressure to sell. There's a lot more to do." Lacey: "We both make more money than any of our

high school guidance counselors would ever have predicted. And after a lifetime of causing trouble, does it make sense that we'd sell our creation to some oatmeal-eating middle managers from some chain? Where the hell would you move to escape the terrible shame?"

So far, the growth of the chains — and the shootout between them — have done no harm to alternative

Texas Observer

journalism, and probably given the entire industry a much-needed energy boost. Homogenization hasn't happened. More than two out of three readers of an alternative weekly still read a daily paper that's locally produced, written, edited — and owned. Inevitably, however, the alternative newspaper business became too profitable for consolidation not to

happen. Just as inevitably, the process will continue — and possibly even inspire more chain wannabes to enter the market, looking for papers to buy. If the time should come when today's alternatives are herded into two or three dominant clusters, not only would the identity and the originality of those papers be at risk — the reason behind their very existence would have been fatally undermined.

Today, the independence and the creative spark of America's alternative newspapers are very much intact. If the rising chain owners continue on their current course, there is no imminent threat. But there are no guarantees for tomorrow. Not in life. And certainly not on the money side of journalism. ■



THE BUSINESS CENTURY

*How the Economy Became
Hot News
in the Last 100 Years*



As the millennium looms, CJR presents another entry in our series chronicling journalism's triumphs and disasters, hits and misses — and hard lessons learned — during the 1900s.

BY BILL SAPORITO

In the gritty little industrial hamlet where I grew up, one of the most coveted opportunities sought by high school graduates was a job at the Radio Corporation of America factories that stood shoulder to shoulder at one end of town. Get a job there and you were set but good, because "the RCA," as it was known, took care of its own.

This was not an unreasonable way to think in the early 1960s. And for people so employed—who looked at corporations as benevolent fathers—the need for business news or personal finance magazines was minimal, indeed ludicrous. If any folks owned stock it was because the company, like Sears, gave it to them as a retirement plan. Their need for information about technology, foreign competitors, career management, health care choices, and investing simply didn't exist. Less than 10 percent of all households owned stock. The only daily statistic that mattered in town was the "handle" at the race track, "the number" that determined the payouts the bookies would be making.

This "no need to know" existence came to an ugly demise.

Bill Saporito is business editor of Time magazine

CORIS BETTMANN

The RCA plants, which made vacuum tubes three shifts a day, were obliterated by Japanese transistor technologies. Over the next twenty years this meltdown would be repeated in industries from shoemaking to steel. Business had become war. Accurate intelligence was becoming essential.

And that's the most remarkable aspect of business and financial journalism today: how much we all need it. Newspapers have poured resources into expanded business sections. When the Brazilian real implodes, the news is crucial to us here in the U.S., and a knowledgeable generation of reporters deftly explains the ramifications, as if the disruption were a water main break on a busy street. Business has never been better for business magazines — *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Business Week* — as well as for newcomers like *Fast Company* and technozines such as *Wired* and *Red Herring*. In the last decade readers have been overwhelmed with financial advice from *Money*, *Smart-Money*, *Worth*, *Kiplinger's*, and dozens of titles for would-be entrepreneurs and stock market wizards.

Publishers have been successful because in the market-addicted, high-velocity, global economy, the uninformed can soon become the unemployed and the uncaptialized. Today, the average worker might expect to run through a half dozen or more jobs during his or her work life. Knowing which way the business wind is blowing is essential. Is South Korea adding microchip capacity? Will Mexico suck my industry south? Are the Brazilians dumping steel? Will the trend in outsourcing include me? And, unlike our parents and grandparents, even if we never change jobs we have important choices to make: Which health care plan? Stocks or bonds? Which mutual funds for my 401K. Should I buy high tech now, or Japan? Should I open a Roth IRA? Invest in a REIT or a Zero Coupon? Should I move my parents' assets into a non-revocable trust? Hey, just what the hell is a non-revocable trust anyway?



Charles H. Dow



Edward D. Jones



Clarence Barron

COVERING EDISON AND FORD

These were clearly not the issues a century ago, when labor toiled in the maelstrom of the Industrial Age, and management engaged in a free-for-all of capital formation, accumulation, and manipulation. In 1900, in those very same RCA plants, workers were then churning out lightbulbs for one of Thomas Edison's successor companies, General Electric. In the press, Edison was the Wizard of Menlo Park, New Jersey, the man of 2 percent inspiration and 98 percent perspiration.

Edison and his great admirer, Henry Ford, exemplified the hero inventor/entrepreneur that still infuses the American legend with every newly made Silicon Valley billionaire. Men like Edison and Ford offered the promise of convenience, conveyance, and entertainment. Their exploits, and those of mighty industry, were regularly saluted in magazines such as *Century* and *McClure's* and *Scientific American*. For instance, in 1906, the Baltimore *Sun* ran an admiring six-part series edited by H.L. Mencken on the vast Maryland (later Bethlehem) Steel works at Sparrows Point, a massive mill town that housed and segregated all workers and their families by race, employment, and economic status.

Edison, who could invent just about anything but a profit stream, had lost control of his company by 1900. A lousy manager and a mean-spirited, sometimes stupid competitor, Edison had been maneuvered into a buyout by the master financier of the time, J. Pierpont Morgan, in 1882. With their constant battles over companies, moneymen like Morgan and John D. Rockefeller provided much grist for the print mills of the early century. The robber barons and their machinations made muckraking necessary. And the penny press, itself a product of "new technology," provided a vast audience, creating a rich newspapering environment in the big cities — New York had a dozen competing papers, as well as a plethora of magazines.

These journals chronicled the last days of the Gilded Age, an era of capitalism practiced at its cruelest, with no

laws to prevent the exploitation of children, or to protect consumers or safeguard the environment. In 1904, Herbert N. Casson wrote in *Munsey's Magazine*: "Men by the thousand become directors in corporations who never give a thought to their responsibility to the public or to their employees. They think only of their directors' fees, of fat dividends." Casson was alluding to the horrific *General Slocum* disaster, in which 1,020 persons perished in an excursion boat fire precipitated by corporate negligence. In an excoriating investigative piece, Casson also noted that in the decade preceding 1903, 78,000 persons died in railroad accidents.

HERE COMES THE JOURNAL

There were plenty of financial accidents, too, not all of them accidental. In the nineteenth century, the incredible expansion of railroads and other industries was fueled by bond issues, which in turn were manipulated by major stockholders. These floatations became ammunition with which robber barons such as Edward Harriman, Rockefeller, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jay Gould, and Morgan regularly and rapaciously engaged in market rigging, not to mention price fixing, silent partnerships, bear raids, watered stock, and other now (mostly) illegal methods. Gould, in fact, had owned the *New York World* and used its pages as a shill, until selling it to Joseph Pulitzer in 1883. The trusts were the end products of these financial battles.

Those tactics survived well into the twentieth century, but the perpetrators would be under far more scrutiny. The Panic of 1907 — yet another of the periodic credit shortages this overexpanding economy endured — took with it two large trust banks in New York, and threatened the entire country. The newspapers, led by Pulitzer and Hearst, immediately blamed the moneymen for trying to tilt the banking system for their own gain. Yet Morgan would emerge as a hero. For days, he gathered the leading bankers in his Madison Avenue mansion and, with reporters waiting outside, raised and injected enough money into the banking system to stop a dangerous run on the banks.

But Morgan, who was later accused of profiting from the crisis (and he did), was a press target, much as Rockefeller was for Ida Tarbell, whose landmark series on Standard Oil, published in *McClure's*, doomed the trust. Morgan's nemesis would be the future Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis, who began to take on the "money trust" in *Harper's*. His exposure of the banker's duplicitous dealings in the Boston and Maine railroad erased any notion that Morgan and his ilk had the public much in mind.

On the Street itself, a small rag of a newspaper was beginning to take its place as the official scorekeeper of capitalism. The history of *The Wall Street Journal*, progenitor of the Dow Jones Industrial Average, probably the most printed and broadcast statistical measure in the world, in many ways mirrors the economy and industry it covers. The *Journal* was born as a newsletter in 1884 and reflected the rules of the day governing finance and investing, and coverage of same — there weren't any. Charles H. Dow and Edward D. Jones, and their associate Charles M. Bergstresser, set up shop at 15 Wall Street after breaking away from a news agency where they were employed. According to one history, *Worldly Powers*, Dow, age 29, was worried about their lack of sophistication and sought advice from railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington. "Go ahead," he told them. "Nobody knows anything about the stock market."

Nobody even knew for certain the recent prices at which stocks and bonds had been trading until Dow and Jones began listing the top twenty issues. Then they split the list into railroads and industrials, the latter listed simply by their Street names: Sugar, Tobacco, Lead. The rest of the paper carried news fragments from the Street, one-sentence theater reviews, and whatever else the three could cram into their four pages.

Informing readers was not necessar-



A *Saturday Evening Post* editorial cartoon, circa 1936, by artist Herbert Johnson

ily the goal of financial reporting in the first three decades of the century. Advertisers knew they could buy silence or puff pieces. Syndicates about to make a move offered gifts of stock or inside information to the reporters, editors, and publishers. The gesture was considered a fringe benefit.

"GOOD TIMES" IN '29?

A leading practitioner was one of New York's biggest and by most counts its worst publisher, Frank Munsey, creator of one of the first mass market magazines — modestly named for himself. Munsey kept a sharp eye on the stock market, and with good reason: he was an avid speculator, a major shareholder in U.S. Steel, and so successful at stockpicking that his considerable fortune helped endow New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. His prowess as a publisher is less dazzling. He helped destroy nearly a dozen newspapers in a frenzy of consolidation and liquidation in a number of cities, including New York, where he shut the *Sun* and the *Mail*, among others.

In 1904, *The Wall Street Journal* would begin its climb to greatness when the last of its founders, Jones, sold the paper to its Boston correspondent, Clarence Barron. Actually, it was Barron's wife who bought the business and ran it until 1912, when Clarence, who had his own news service in Boston, took over. The effect was immediate. As a newspaper, the *Jour-*

nal's voice would grow more strident, what with the bombastic, barrel-shaped Barron — he went 5 foot 5 and breached 300 pounds — pouring his considerable newspapering energy into its columns. The *Journal* was an unrepentant booster of the market, and the sworn enemy of anyone who would seek to regulate it. Barron became such a famous raconteur that he later established *Barron's* magazine to share his invariably upbeat utterings about the essential strength of the market, all the while continuing to make inside trades.

When Barron died in 1928, his stepdaughter, Jane Bancroft, inherited the *Journal*. For the paper's editors, this proved beneficial. Bancroft and her heirs were practically mute until 1997, when Dow Jones & Co. began to stumble financially.

Barron was lucky enough to expire before the stock market crash unmasked the hypocrisy of financial journalism. John Kenneth Galbraith, in his book *The Great Crash*, dismissed financial coverage of the era as the province of "drunks and incompetents." That's a little harsh. But clearly publications such as *Forbes*, established in 1917 by New York *American* columnist B.C. Forbes, and *The Magazine of Wall Street*, published by Cecilia G. Wyckoff, continued to cheer on the market, and see their circulation rise correspondingly.

At the beginning of 1929, the newspapers had been relentlessly upbeat, and with some reason. *The Washington Post* reflected this rosy view. (GOOD TIMES ARE PREDICTED IN 1929.) So did the Chicago *Daily Tribune*: NEW YEAR BEGINS WITH U.S. AT PEAK OF PROSPERITY, and JOYOUS BULLS CONFIDENT IN 1929 MARKET. The *Trib* would note some unevenness in the economy, but its one paragraph of uncertainty, a throwaway, noted: "There is nothing in prospect to cause a slump unless excessive speculation in securities should produce adverse effects."

Oh, that.

To be fair, the *Trib's* man in New York did wax uneasy over the course of the year, as interests rates for "call money" soared to 15 percent by July. And certainly, as Galbraith also pointed out, *The New York*

CORBIS BETTMANN

Times was no raging bull. Its legendary financial editor, Alexander Dana Noyes, wasn't buying the popular wisdom. On January 1, 1929, he wrote. "The acknowledged and very rash abuse of credit . . . the fantastic illusions that are entertained of the economic future and the public's appetite, in the face of unsettled credit, for the most reckless stock speculation are distinctly disquieting." Quite.

FORTUNE'S 'POETS'

There were few other warning voices, and even the market's pullback in February, after the Fed tightened, failed to discourage many reporters, who were no doubt leveraged to the hilt. In May, the Hoover administration produced a report on economic development between 1922 to 1929 that uncovered an "Era of Prosperity." Some pundits began to wonder if the American economy had dispensed with the business cycle. (Sound familiar?) The *Trib* wrote on February 4, 1929: "Controversy continues as active as in 1928 over whether the question of American finance has entered an era of such entirely novel circumstances that financial experience no longer counts for anything."

The stock market ceased to be merely a financial story on October 24. It was now big news, very bad news. Initially journalists of all stripes believed the bankers who told them that the downturn was merely a clearout of speculators. The Depression politicized business coverage, particularly after Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal began to assert itself. For many publishers, FDR's regulation of prices and profits, his bank holidays, his massive public works projects, was blatant interference with the market, an impediment to the natural order of economic man.

Two financial magazines would rise within this storm of the Depression. *Time* publisher Henry Luce had been planning *Fortune* for more than a year, having detached the magazine's business writer to study the prospects. "There is no real competition," Parker Lloyd-Smith wrote to Luce. "Established business magazines will not or can not handle stories as we think they should be handled." Luce didn't need to be convinced. In a presentation

to the board, he outlined the magazine's lofty aspirations "It will be as beautiful a magazine as exists in the United States . . . It will be authoritative to the last letter . . . It will be brilliantly written . . ."

Luce couldn't interest any of New York's established financial journalists in so grand a notion. This brush-off proved a boon, because he then had to go outside the circle of finance. Famously, he said, "There are men who can write poetry, and there are men who can read balance sheets. The men who can read balance sheets cannot write . . . Of necessity, we made the discovery that it is easier to turn poets into business journalists than to turn bookkeepers into writers."

Over its first decades *Fortune's* writers would indeed make business part of literature and arts. Archibald MacLeish, Dwight Macdonald, and James Agee were left-leaning and sometimes left wondering how on earth they could be laboring for what Luce planned as a glossy shrine to capitalism, expressively photographed by Walker Evans and Margaret Bourke-White. The Depression proved a rich subject for *Fortune's*



Henry Luce

platoons of gifted writers, aided by an equally gifted group of women researchers who did most of the reporting and interviewing. Luce's poets could write up an industry such as chemicals or oil as if it were an *objet d'art* they'd picked off a shelf, giving life to the subtle details, analyzing the workmanship and admiring its good and bad qualities. Yet there isn't much in these stories to indicate that the poets understood a balance sheet, even if one were written in iambic pentameter. When Eric Hodgins became managing editor in 1935, he said he inherited as "insane, unreliable, alcoholic, and, all in all, I think the most brilliant magazine staff ever to exist in America."

Fortune's glamorous authors have been written about so much that the debut of *Business Week* a year earlier tends to be overlooked. McGraw-Hill Publishing Co. had been chronicling America's growing industries since 1866 in trade publications such as *Engineering and Mining Journal*, and *Power*. *Business Week* was a logical combination of all the information the company's reporters had been gathering across many industries. This was not an end-

Archibald
MacLeishJames
AgeeDwight
Macdonald

less list of stocks and prices, but real information about real companies. Poets need not apply.

KILGORE TO THE RESCUE

The *Wall Street Journal*, in the meantime, was struggling to avoid becoming a victim of the Crash it had so largely misread. To make matters worse, several *Journal* columnists had been shown in congressional investigations to be on the take. The *Journal* would be saved by a bright young man out of DePauw University in Indiana who would perceive that the problem with *The Wall Street Journal* was that Wall Street wasn't all that interesting. Barney Kilgore had joined the paper as a twenty-year-old, been sent to its nascent West Coast edition and then migrated to Washington, where he counted Franklin Roosevelt as a fan. The *Journal* until then had been the stepchild to its much more profitable ticker.

When Kilgore, at age 31, took over the lackluster property, he set out to turn it into a national newspaper, one that had relevance to businessmen beyond downtown Manhattan. "Brokers are nice people," he said, "There just aren't enough of them to keep a first-class newspaper afloat." Henceforth, the *Journal* would be less concerned with the number of cotton contracts traded yesterday than with the greater issue of how trends in fabric usage might affect the textile and retail industries.

Kilgore reshaped the front page. He banished advertising to inside pages. He made the right and left hand columns the sites of the paper's lead articles. He divided the paper's two front-page news columns into Business



Barney Kilgore

and Finance, and World-Wide. He ran a rotating series of columns — Washington Wire, Taxes, The Outlook — in column five. And after some tinkering, he transformed the orphaned fourth column into an offbeat feature well, the A-Head. The paper's format, albeit vastly expanded, is substantially unchanged today (with a circulation of 1.9 million), a fairly amazing monument to Kilgore's grasp of what his readers wanted.

After World War II, financial journalism took a long nap. America did not. From 1950 to 1974, with but two brief disruptions, the American economy cranked out year after year of growth. This demand-driven expansion could not be stopped, and every house builder, car builder and insurance seller in the nation was hard pressed to fail. "The U.S. rolled through 1955 in two-toned splendor to an all-time crest of prosperity" noted *Time* in naming GM c.e.o. Harlow Curtice Man of the Year. The Dow began the decade of the fifties at 200 and left at 677. Elvis was gyrating and the Yankees were shellacking all comers. What sap wanted to spend his days reporting that U.S. Steel was operating at 90 percent of capacity or that the Curb Market was steadily higher after modest trading?

Scan the ragged clips from the fifties and sixties of any morgue and it looks as if the same white guy in white shirt and gray suit is staring back at you. Okay, some of them wear fedoras. Most large newspapers including *The New York Times* are chock full of pictures of organization men who had just been promoted to vice president of the paper clip division of Amalgamated Metal-binding.

A NEW ROLE FOR TV

Across America, newspapers of all shapes and sizes were enjoying exquisite growth as ad pages piled in from car dealers, real estate developers, breweries, and department stores. Business pages often were bereft of enterprising reporting. In a company town where the publisher and the plant manager, the developer and the car dealers all convened at the Rotary, no premium was placed on investigating pollution or union busting or usurious car financing. Nor were papers in railroad

towns all that interested in covering train wrecks. A steady diet of store openings, job promotions, safety awareness days, and good earnings news would do just fine, thank you.

Television in its early days was having a hard enough time keeping its head on straight to worry much about business reporting. It brought us the oddity of future tobacco company stalkers such as *60 Minutes*'s Mike Wallace appearing (earlier in his career) in advertisements for Philip Morris, and every newscast bedecked with sponsor signage. Yet in Edward R. Murrow's classic documentary on migrant workers, *Harvest of Shame*, the beginning of a new television role for corporate America was beginning to emerge: bogey man. This is a role that television would exploit wonderfully: the hapless corporate spokesdope, cornered by a camera crew, trying desperately to explain exactly why a little toxic spill or nuclear accident isn't all that bad for the community.

The sixties ended the free pass that corporations had enjoyed since World War II. Corporations were being asked to answer for their behavior, for their participation in the Vietnam war, for their use and abuse of the environment, and for their overall influence in our lives. The assault was led from the left, naturally, from the loyal opposition: like *I.F. Stone's Weekly* and *The Nation*, and more raffish organs such as *Mother Jones*, *The Village Voice*, and *Ramparts*. The message: Wall Street and all its corporations were greedy bastards intent on destroying the world for profit. But the boys and girls in mainstream publications would follow. Suddenly, annual meetings that could once cure insomnia became political flashpoints, particularly at "war profiteer" companies such as Dow, General Dynamics, and DuPont. The public relations business boomed.

The post-war party officially ended in 1974, when inflation, sprung by the Arab oil boycott, began to eat the Dow alive, and the Japanese, like the namesake beetle, gnawed away at American industries like so much soft wood. It was bad for the economy and bad for American industry, but it marked a turning point in journalism. Business as usual was finished.

In Pittsburgh and other industrial towns, basic industry was under siege from cheap foreign steel, aluminum, and other primary products. This awful and frightening dislocation would force journalists to begin to comprehend the

forces of the global economy at a macro level, and the painful reality of unemployment at the local level. They would share in it, too. The depopulating center cities and the increasing number of two-income families with decreasing leisure time were reducing the number of two-newspaper towns in general and afternoon newspapers in particular.

The complex problem of inflation and infinitely higher energy prices was forcing consumers to come up with new strategies for managing their households. *Money* magazine was born in this era, and positioned to do exactly that. Consumers didn't need much help in their shopping; they could figure out that if prices were rising 10 percent annually and gasoline was \$1.50 a gallon, they would have to trade down from brand names to no names and trade Chevys for Datsuns. But they would begin to need guidance in understanding some new concepts that had begun to disturb their lives: at the Fed, Paul Volcker was fighting stagflation by jacking up interest rates until we all screamed. Reporters learned how to spell "monetarist."

At the end of the decade, Congress passed legislation allowing companies to set up a new kind of savings plan. The program took the name 401K, after some subparagraph of the tax code from where it had bubbled up. The 401K legislation could have been called the Financial Journalists' Redeployment Act, because Congress was helping create a new publishing segment in the process. From now on, consumers would need to know more about investing. And help was on the way. *Money* would place an emphasis on it with cover lines like "Your Best Investments Now." Columnist Sylvia Porter, who'd been dishing advice since the 1930s, would convert her growing popularity into the monthly *Sylvia Porter's Personal Finance*; and the Washington tax newsletter *Kiplinger's* would spawn a four-color magazine, book publishing, computer software, and syndicated television reports.

PREDATORS AND BARBARIANS

Takeover wars were not pretty, but they sure were fun. The rabble rousers such as T. Boone Pickens, Irwin (the Liquidator)

Jacobs, Carl Icahn, and Sir James Goldsmith served notice on moss-covered c.e.o.s that there would be no protection for underperforming companies. The leveraged buyout firm



Malcolm Forbes of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, KKR, would become as well known as IBM. The hometown papers of companies under siege would typically, and not surprisingly, go on the defensive, noting the potential disruptions to jobs and the community if the hated outsiders won the company. Editorials railed against these quick-buck invaders who dared break up comfy old corporations where generations of townsmen had labored loyally. At the *Journal*, Susan Faludi would win a Pulitzer for her account of the human consequences in the wake of the raider-induced recapitalization of Safeway Stores — a deal that shareholders ultimately applauded.

By the 1980s — just as in the 1880s — the morality of business and Wall Street, or lack thereof, became a hot topic again. The Morgan of his day was Michael Milken, the junk bond king of Drexel Burnham Lambert. Milken was to takeovers what Nobel was to warfare. He forced a corporate revolution of sorts, and the drama led to a number of best-selling books. Connie Bruck, in *The Predators' Ball*, would reveal the inner workings of the junk bond mill at Drexel, over the company's furious protestations about having been hoodwinked. Michael Lewis' *Liar's Poker* portrayed Salomon Bros. as a sort of fraternity house for millionaire bond traders. It would all end spectacularly with Milken and Ivan Boesky, an inside trader, in jail. James B. Stewart and Daniel Hertzberg would win a Pulitzer in 1988 for their *Wall Street Journal* articles on insider trading scandals.

The grandest deal of the decade filled the pages of newspapers and magazines for weeks on end in 1988. When c.e.o. Ross Johnson led a group of executives in the attempted takeover of RJR Nabisco in what would be the biggest deal to that time, the machinations were even better than fiction. Johnson made *Time's* cover as a symbol of corporate greed. The *Journal* and *The New York Times* feasted on these ongoing battles, chronicling the number-crunching days



B.C. Forbes

and champagne nights, of Wall Street's warring parties. In the RJR takeover, the *Journal's* Bryan Burrough and John Helyar hooked into the best story of their lives, leading to another bestselling book, *Barbarians at the Gate*.

These were perfect years for Malcolm Forbes, the free spending, free living publisher of the magazine that bore his name. *Forbes* had always worshipped the kind of deal-jockeying, take-no-prisoners capitalists who crushed unions, outsmarted the competition, and didn't care what anyone thought about it. Curiously, Malcolm wasn't one of them, but his yacht was bigger than theirs, and he used it, along with a gift for promotion, to keep his magazine humming.

C.e.o.s would become celebrities in their own right, led by GE's ass-kicking Jack Welch, Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffet, Coke's Roberto Goizueta, and Chrysler's comeback kid, Lee Iacocca, who wrote the best-sellers *Iacocca: An Autobiography* and *Talking Straight*.

THE DOW'S BIG JOYRIDE

By then, readers couldn't get enough personal financial reporting, particularly since more of them were playing the game. Stock ownership was expanding rapidly, because 401Ks were replacing company stock plans all over the country, forcing people who had never bought a share in their lives to make investment decisions. And with interest rates plunging, folks began listening to the pundits in the press who preached (Say it again, brothers and sisters!) that over the long, long run, stocks are the best investment. The mutual fund industry, led by Fidelity, was growing explosively, creating investment stars like the Magellan Fund's Peter Lynch.

In 1982, the Dow took off on a joyride that lasted until October 19, 1987. *Money* had just published its fifteenth anniversary issue. Alan Greenspan graced the cover of *Fortune*. The market didn't care. It blew off 508 points that Monday. And you know what? Now

readers *really* needed us. When the market regained its losses within two years, Americans decided to cast their lot with the Street forever. The demand for information was going to support new magazines such as *SmartMoney* and *Worth*, both launched in 1992. At the same time, existing magazine like *Fortune* and *Business Week* continued to bulk up their personal finance coverage, adding special issues on investing and retiring. The *Wall Street Journal* added a third section called Money and Investing in 1988. Is there any daily in American that doesn't now have mutual funds listings?

Funny, by 1990 it seemed we were getting too much information. Little



Michael Bloomberg

did we know that the real explosion was about to begin. On Wall Street, Michael Bloomberg, a castoff from Salomon, was building a computerized data service that currently rivals the once invincible Dow Jones. Bloomberg did-

n't stop there. He realized there was an attentive, growing, and lucrative audience for his kind of data— foreign exchange rates, commodities prices, bond prices. So he added Bloomberg TV and Bloomberg radio to augment his Bloomberg machines. Cable television already had leaped on the Wall Street bandwagon with a pair of twenty-four-hour, all-financial-news networks — CNBC and CNNfn — thereby answering the question: "Who wants to watch stock prices all day?" The answer? Plenty of people.

With the astonishing growth of the Internet, investors have the ultimate weapon. It's now possible to trade stocks, track your portfolio and automatically collect news and information about companies from your PC command center. That's more data than any stock broker or analyst ever had access to for most of the century.

And it isn't enough. The absolute quantity of information, not to mention the increased complexity of the average worker's financial life, continues to raise more questions than the Net, or any other source, can answer.

For business journalists in the twenty-first century, this is very good news indeed. ■

in the public interest

Making a Mess of Digital TV

by Lawrence K. Grossman

A peculiar thing happened on the way to the report of the Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters, the so-called Gore Commission (which should more accurately be called "Advisory Committee on Protecting the Financial Interest of Digital Television Broadcasters").

The majority of its members dismissed their own committee's key "broad consensus" recommendations and urged the Federal Communications Commission to require stronger and more specific public interest standards for digital TV than the "insufficient" and "ineffective" ones their committee proposed. The report's pathetically weak findings, along with the majority's critical comments, were delivered in December to Vice President Al Gore, the White House point person on telecommunications policy, and were promptly buried in the blizzard of impeachment hearings and the bombing of Iraq. A good thing, too.

The twenty-two members presidentially appointed included a TV network president; five TV station heads; cable, computer, and advertising executives; academics; and public interest representatives. Their committee came into being because, under the Telecommunications Act of 1996, all television stations will have to convert to digital transmission over the next few years, opening up a new era of broadcasting. By converting from analog to digital TV, the nation's broadcasters gain the ability to deliver crystal clear, high definition pictures and high fidelity sound on horizontal TV screens shaped like movie screens. Digital technology also gives broadcast-

ers the option of transmitting four or five TV channels in each community instead of the single channel that each is limited to now. And digital TV makes possible the transmission of high-speed data to television sets at home, giving viewers access to the Internet, and offering e-mail and other basic interactive telecommunications services through the TV screen — in short, a host of potential new ways for broadcasters to make money.

To go digital, the nation's broadcasting companies persuaded Congress to give them an estimated seventy billion dollars worth of publicly owned airwaves free of charge, pulling off one of the biggest corporate financial coups of the century. The advisory committee was formed as an afterthought, to advise the FCC, Congress, and the administration exactly what public interest responsibilities should be required of digital TV stations, something no one in the federal government had yet bothered to think about. While the White House saw the committee as the vehicle to recommend that digital broadcasters give free TV time to candidates, the broadcasting industry, having already been handed valuable digital spectrum with no such strings attached, had absolutely no intention of giving away anything it could sell, especially TV time.

After fifteen months of what the committee's co-chairs called "frank and full" discussions — meaning, in plain language, contentiousness and sharp differences of opinion — the report, titled "Charting the Digital Broadcasting Future," proposed that broadcasters be required to demonstrate only "a minimum standard" of public affairs programs and public service spots, leaving it to the FCC to define what that standard should be. For three of the five

broadcast industry representatives on the committee, even a "minimum standard" requirement was too much. In a separate statement of their own, they insisted that the FCC require no specific public interest obligations at all. "Voluntary self-regulation," not FCC mandates, the broadcasters argued, will take care of future public interest needs.

The non-broadcaster majority wanted the committee to propose that digital stations deliver at least three hours of local news and three hours of local educational and public affairs programs a week, but the broadcast industry members would have none of it.

THE BROADCAST INDUSTRY HAD ABSOLUTELY NO INTENTION OF GIVING AWAY ANYTHING IT COULD SELL

Why were the majority's views shunted to the back of the bus, as if they were in the minority, instead of being made part of the report's recommendations up front? "The broadcasters played hardball," one member said, "and threatened to walk out if we voted to recommend, as most of us wanted to, that digital TV be given major and specific public interest obligations." To avoid a politically embarrassing confrontation, the committee co-chairs, CBS president Leslie Moonves and American Enterprise Institute fellow Norman J. Ornstein, did not allow the individual members to vote their own preferences but settled instead for low-

Lawrence K. Grossman is a former president of NBC News and PBS.

est common denominator, "broad consensus" proposals.

The one recommendation that the White House expected the committee to make, indeed the reason it formed the committee in the first place, was to require broadcasters to grant free TV time to political candidates. That recommendation also failed to appear in its final consensus report. Instead, digital broadcasters are asked merely to volunteer free time "for candidate-centered discourse," but only if Congress passes "comprehensive campaign finance reform." The committee urges repeal of the law requiring TV stations to charge candidates their "lowest unit rate" for campaign commercials, suggesting that in return digital broadcasters could make available two and a half hours of television time free of charge (five minutes a night for thirty days before the election), to be shared by all major candidates.

The committee's pusillanimous recommendations provoked a remarkably vitriolic dissent from its most prominent member, former FCC chairman Newton N. Minow of "vast wasteland" fame. Citing a recent Howard Stern television show featuring Stern shaving a young woman's pubic area, Minow suggested that the committee's failure to impose stronger public interest obligations would help drive digital TV down "to a level where public interest is confused with public interest."

While the report cites the need to "improve political discourse and invigorate democratic deliberation," it makes no mention of the need for digital TV stations to broadcast news. The only mention of news appears in the appendix, in the form of a draft voluntary code that spells out ideal "principles and aspirations" for covering elections and delivering news in the digital era. Alas, no TV station operating today would be able to meet the standards of what is actually a remarkably good model for a TV news code.

It urges every station to devote significant time to coverage of substantive election issues, as well as ballot initiatives and referendums. It proposes that stations avoid emphasizing "the sensational and the prurient," and stop giving "excessive or undue attention to sensational political or personal accusations, or to issues of 'who is ahead.'"

The draft code calls for TV's news

programming to "be both substantive and well-balanced"; to pay substantial attention to both local and national issues; to avoid "morbid, sensationalistic, or alarming details . . . in connection with stories of crime or sex," and to stay away from gossip. It calls for clearly separating advertising from news, and for all commentary and analysis to be identified as such. It says that news interviewers should select what questions to ask and that the audience should be told whenever an advance agreement materially restricts important or newsworthy areas of questioning, or when an interviewee insists that questions be submitted in advance, or participates in editing the interview. It's too bad the committee's co-chairmen buried those proposed TV news standards in the report's appendix, instead of giving them a prominent place up front among the recommendations, where they belong.

In addition to recommending that the FCC impose only "minimum stan-

THE ONLY MENTION OF NEWS APPEARS IN THE REPORT'S APPENDIX

dards" for public affairs programming and public service spots, the committee offers a series of stale, ineffectual requirements that digital broadcasters survey their communities' needs and interests, disclose to their audience what public interest activities they do, and set voluntary standards of conduct for themselves. It recommends that digital broadcasters who implement commercial datacasting, such as stock quotes and sports stats, also transmit data for schools, such as lunch menus and snow day information, and information about public hearings and schedules of events for libraries, community organizations, governmental bodies, and public safety institutions. It proposes that stations that choose to divide their spectrum into multiple digital channels either pay a special fee, contribute one of their digital channels for public use, or make an in-kind contribution to public interest programming carried elsewhere. It also calls on stations to transmit disaster warnings, expand closed captioning and video descrip-

tions for the blind, and encourage diversity "in programming, political discourse, hiring, promotion, and business opportunities."

The committee comes out strongly in favor of public television, urging Congress to create an independent trust fund to finance public broadcasting in the digital age. It recommends that the broadcast frequencies that public television now uses not be auctioned off for commercial purposes but be retained for noncommercial educational programming. (Under the Telecommunications Act of 1996, after the conversion to digital TV, all broadcasters are supposed to return the frequencies they currently use for analog television. Those frequencies will then be auctioned off by the FCC, with the money going to the U.S. Treasury.)

Add all the committee's recommendations together, however, and they do not come close to bringing a fair return to the American people for the multibillion-dollar corporate windfall in publicly owned spectrum that Congress gave away for digital TV.

Symptomatic of the advisory committee's inability to deal effectively with the major issues it was supposed to confront is its final counsel to the administration, Congress, and the FCC to "explore alternative approaches" and "consider developing a whole new model of public interest obligations" — the very job the advisory committee itself failed to do.

In 1997 I was asked if I would allow my name to be submitted for membership on the committee but I did not make the final cut. At the time, I wrote a column for these pages expressing skepticism about the committee's prospects, offering my own recommendations for what it should do, and predicting a bleak outcome for its work (CJR, September/October 1997). Too bad, that prediction turned out to be on the mark. As thirteen of the committee's own members have acknowledged, the FCC, Congress, and the administration need to see to it that the public interest will be far better served in the digital age than their own inadequate report has proposed. Given the broadcasting industry's huge campaign contributions, effective lobbying, powerful political clout, and willingness to "play hardball," the chances of that happening appear to be slim or none. ♦

books

Journalism to the Max

by Jonathan Z. Larsen

In *The Times of My Life*, Max Frankel has accomplished the improbable. He has written a memoir in which the least interesting portion — by far — covers his eight years as the executive editor of *The New York Times* — his moment of glory at the very summit of American newspaper journalism. In some measure, this may simply be a rueful commentary on the job of editor itself in this day of intense multimedia competition, budgetary pressure, and heightened public scrutiny. It is also in part because Frankel's early childhood in Nazi Germany, his adolescence as a recent immigrant in New York City's rough-and-tumble Washington Heights, and his sixteen-year career as a correspondent for the *Times* make for such compelling reading that any accounting of a desk job, however grand, is bound to seem anticlimactic. Finally, it is altogether possible that Frankel was never cut out for the editor's job. In the foreword to his memoir, he speaks of his "search for identity as well as safety, a yearning to belong but also to keep on running, to make a career of my roving, my outsiderhood."

Throughout his roving career as a correspondent, he had yearned for recognition and advancement, expressing bitter disappointment at each obstacle and delay in rising to the very top of the paper. Yet once ensconced in the job he coveted, he lost the outsider status that gave him both protection and identity.

Whatever the reason, this falling off comes toward the end of an otherwise compelling book. It is a tale of consummate journalistic endeavor and success, told by a master storyteller.

Now 68, Frankel was two years old when Hitler came to

Jonathan Z. Larsen is a former editor of New Times and The Village Voice.



Washington bureau chief "Supermax," from a 1969 poster on delivery trucks

power. On the very first page he writes: "I could have become a good little Nazi in his army. I loved parades; I wept when other kids marched beneath our window without me. But I was ineligible for the Aryan race."

When Max was eight, he and his parents were arrested without explanation. On that particular day, 15,000 Jews of Polish descent were rounded up by the Gestapo and SS for deportation back to Poland. But Poland had recently declared that Polish passports were valid only, Frankel writes, "if they bore a certain purple rubber stamp, which was, conveniently, unavailable to most Jews, particularly those living

outside of Poland." Thus began a two-year nightmare of Kafkaesque cruelty and catch-22 idiocies that would have broken all but the strongest spirits. The family became separated. Max's father, trapped in Krakow, Poland, eventually smuggled himself into the Soviet Union, where he would remain for seven years, until rejoining his family in New York on Columbus Day, 1946. Max and his mother ("Mutti") returned to Ger-

THE TIMES OF MY LIFE AND MY LIFE WITH THE TIMES

BY MAX FRANKEL
RANDOM HOUSE
560 PP. \$29.95

many, where she spent the next two years alternately beseeching, charming, and challenging a succession of German police, Gestapo operatives, and not a few American embassy officials, until she secured passage to America. The literature of World War II is graced by having such a remarkable story of deliverance, told in such rich detail by a born witness, not yet ten at the time.

The family's harrowing escape marked Frankel as a

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BOOKS

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"chronic fugitive, forever looking to escape the mundane, to find new soil and stimulation." This he accomplished through journalism, for which he seemed ideally suited, possessed as he was with an unblinking curiosity, an intuitive mind, and a fluid hand. "I could not resist the lures of journalism," he writes. "The license to pry into all corners of life, the chance to champion remedies for discovered wrongs, the easy access to persons of every rank, and the reliable armor to shield an otherwise debilitating shyness."

At Columbia University, he joined the *Spectator*, quickly rising to become its editor. "My deputies," Frankel reports, "included two future presidents of network news, Richard C. Wald and Lawrence K. Grossman; a third, Roone Arledge, labored down the hall editing our yearbook."

While still a sophomore, he landed the job of campus stringer for the *Times*, and later he won a full-time position on the rewrite desk. At midnight one night in July 1956, while holding down the lobster shift (8:00 P.M. to 3:20 A.M.), the *Times's* radio room heard faint SOS signals from the newest of Italy's luxury passenger ships, just to the south of Nantucket. Soon thereafter came a second SOS from the S.S. *Stockholm*, the ship that had rammed the *Andrea Doria*. With one ear in the radio room and the other listening to the sleepy shipping experts he was calling, Frankel worked over an "ever-lengthening, ever more vividly imagined description of the eerie Atlantic scene . . . All the top editors drifted into the office to follow the drama that their most junior reporter was stitching together with the help of many hands." As the *Andrea Doria* sank, so rose Frankel's fortunes. The 7:30 A.M. Extra edition that morning carried an eight-column banner and Frankel's byline.

Late that year, Frankel was sent off with his new bride, Tobi Brown, for "two or three weeks" to help report Hungary's short-lived revolt against the Soviet Union from the listening post of Vienna. They soon moved from Austria to Moscow, where they stayed for three years. "It felt like a flight to the dark side of the moon," writes Frankel.

In spite of his trepidations, he became a first-rate Kremlinologist, and something of an expert at composing

cryptograms. To get around the censors, it was necessary to write in a fashion that would be readily understandable to the readers back home, yet undecipherable to the men with the rubber stamps. Thus, for the *Times's* travel section he wrote about Soviet airlines: "It is not true that Russian planes do not have seat belts. Most planes, even on domestic milk runs, have at least one or two sets, and the diligent passenger usually can find them before his trip is over." The censors took that as a fine compliment indeed.

Over time, Frankel would suss out the Sino-Soviet split, years before officials in Washington took it seriously, write with passion about the persecution of Russian artists and writers, and come to understand Nikita Khrushchev as perhaps no other Western journalist of the period.

Most of the free world saw Khrushchev as crude and bellicose; Frankel saw instead "a peasant's wit, cunning, and vigor." Khrushchev, writes Frankel, proclaimed a "maddening faith in the ultimate superiority of socialist economies, but it was capitalist achievements that he envied and market incentives that he longed to unleash." Khrushchev, in short, was not nearly as frightening as he pretended to be. It was an informed intuition that would stand Frankel in good stead not only throughout his Moscow years, but also in covering the Soviet missile crisis a few years later.

The *Times* next dispatched him to Cuba as its "Caribbean correspondent" because, as the foreign editor put it, "All America wants to know whether Fidel Castro is a Communist. There's no one better to find out." Frankel disagreed. "I read the news from Latin America," he confesses, "only when aborigines or Nazis were discovered there." Worse, he had been thrown into a bureau "between feuding writers, both old enough to be my parents and vastly more experienced in the subject . . . I felt ill-used, and ill-suited for the assignment, and my distaste grew by the day." But once again he was in the right place at the right time. He writes of the experience: "Castro evolved into a Marxist before my eyes, and American efforts to deal with him crashed around my feet."

Frankel was finally brought in from the cold in 1961, with a call from Scotty Reston, the *Times's* legendary Washington bureau chief. Frankel was thrilled. He

had become "one of Scotty's boys, a member of the A-team covering the seat of empire for the world's greatest newspaper at the height of the American century."

In time, the titles would pile up for Frankel: diplomatic correspondent, White House correspondent, Washington bureau chief, chief Washington correspondent.

Though he did not seem to realize it at the time, Frankel was having the time of his life. Kennedy's Washington was "glamorous and quaint, sexist and arrogant, and those of us caught up in its warp found the combination intoxicating."

Frankel takes the reader along for his

The habitual outsider was now inside, and his discomfort seemed to grow with each promotion

glorious ride, folding broad context into personal anecdote in the manner of the very best historians. At the beginning of the Cuban missile crisis, for instance, we find Reston on the phone to President Kennedy, with Frankel on the extension. Kennedy confirms to Reston that the Soviets have placed nuclear offensive weapons on Cuban soil, and asks Reston, "And do you know what I am going to do about it?" Reston looks over at Frankel, who shrugs. "No, sir, we don't, except we know you promised to act and we hear you've asked for television time tomorrow night." Kennedy responded: "That is right. I'm going to order a blockade — a blockade of all Soviet shipping to Cuba."

Kennedy went on to ask Reston to delay reporting the news until he himself had addressed the nation. Frankel dutifully wrote the lead story for the next day's paper, telling much less than he knew, but refusing to put it under his byline: "I wanted our deception of the readers to be a collective responsibility."

As White House correspondent during the Johnson presidency, Frankel had firsthand experience of LBJ's paranoia. Following the president's decision not to seek his party's nomination in

1968, LBJ announced to the press pool on Air Force One: "The only difference between my assassination and King's and Kennedy's is mine's a live one — more tortuous — more sadistic."

Frankel's crowning achievement as Washington bureau chief was the publication in June 1971 of the *Pentagon Papers*, the Defense Department's secret study of the Vietnam war. Though it took many reporters and editors to ready the papers for publication, several lawyers to defend their publication after the fact, and final approval from publisher Punch Sulzburger and editor Abe Rosenthal, Frankel had been the champion of the *Pentagon Papers* from the moment Neil Sheehan dropped a brown paper bag full of them on his desk in March of that year. At the outset, he had to overcome the reluctance of both Rosenthal and Sulzberger; he had to convince the paper's own lawyers that the publication of the papers would betray no national security secrets; and he had to suffer through the initial "annoying indifference" of the Washington readership.

How important were the *Pentagon Papers*? Totally apart from their impact on the public perception of the Vietnam war, Frankel reminds us that it was their publication, and the *Times*'s ultimate vindication before the Supreme Court when Nixon tried to suppress them, that began the unraveling of the Nixon White House.

Frankel carefully reconstructs how, on the very day of the *Times*'s court victory, Nixon ordered H.R. Haldeman and John D. Erlichman to "set up a little group right here in the White House" (Haldeman's quote) to illegally attack his perceived enemies — to break into the vaults of the Brookings Institution, to smear former Kissinger aide Daniel Ellsberg (who had leaked the *Pentagon Papers* to the *Times*), and to break into Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office. This same team of "plumbers" would contrive to break into Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Hotel the following year.

Frankel is commendably forthright about his own failure to compete adequately with *The Washington Post* once the Watergate scandal broke. Acknowledging that the *Post* outscored the *Times* "at least five to one," he laments, "I had better alibis for our Watergate fail-

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BOOKS

ures than the president had for his, but much as I welcomed his disgrace, my frustration was so great that I could never fully savor it."

Oddly enough, it was Nixon's animus towards the *Times* that led in part to Frankel's Pulitzer Prize. In 1972, Nixon stood an entire political career as a communist baiter on its head by traveling to Beijing to embrace Mao. Still furious at the *Times*'s victory over the Pentagon Papers, the president decreed that the *Times* could send only a single correspondent. That was to be Frankel. He recalls: "My anger turned to rage when I encountered vice presidents from all the television networks and other obvious tourists among the one hundred 'journalists' boarding the press plane. I vowed to outdo not only the other newspapers but all the networks that the White House was courting so elaborately at the start of this election year."

And so Frankel did. For a full week he was a whirling dervish of energy and creativity, churning out news stories, news analyses, and his new vehicle for less structured, more colorful reportage, the "reporter's notebook," all in his effort to paint "verbal pictures" that

would be the rival of anything seen on home television screens. Indeed, the television crews, and Nixon's obeisance to them, became the targets of Frankel's sarcasm. Describing the breadth of the Great Wall, he wrote: "The record needs to be amended with the news that only two of the wall's two-story towers can accommodate three rival network anchor men with full crews, several tons of gear, including remote color cameras, several hundred camera-toting extras dangling from the battlements . . . The American Commander in Chief . . . moved confidently past the firing slits in the wall for several hundred yards, showing by his gaze that he knew the position of every major camera emplacement."

Fresh on the heels of his triumph, Frankel was summoned to New York to begin his second career as a desk editor, first as editor of the Sunday paper, then as editor of the editorial page, and finally as the editor.

The habitual outsider was now inside, and his discomfort seemed to grow with each promotion. As he recalls, "I could never recognize myself in the puissant

figure that others saw as they fell silent at my approach or hung upon my every nonchalant word."

He chafed even on the editorial page. "I never fully accepted the legitimacy of editorials in the modern newspaper," Frankel muses. "For whom, really, do these disembodied voices speak? Whose values do they invoke?" But at least he was writing.

It can be argued on the evidence of this memoir that by the time Frankel was chosen to succeed Abe Rosenthal as the executive editor, his best years were behind him. Even the directives Punch Sulzberger gave to Frankel upon turning over the paper sounded oddly curatorial: "Make a great newspaper even greater. Help to break in my son Arthur as the next publisher. Make the newsroom a happy place again."

Though a brilliant editor in many respects, Abe Rosenthal had broken the spirits and trampled the career paths of too many reporters. He was widely held to be anti-feminist and anti-gay, to the point where the *Times* had fallen badly behind in both its promotion of women and its coverage of AIDS. Black faces were few and far between in the newsroom, and missing altogether in management. As Frankel tells it, the tension in the newsroom only became worse "as Rosenthal, in a Lear-like tempest, began to confront his executive mortality."

Of the healing mission that confronted him, Frankel writes: "Actually, I had no plan except to be not-Abe." Indeed, it is hard to believe that Frankel was not somewhat distracted upon reaching the top of the heap in 1986. His wife Tobi, who suffered from bouts of depression and alienation through much of their marriage, had fallen gravely ill with brain cancer; she died in 1987. Later, Frankel began dating Joyce Purnick, the paper's city hall bureau chief. "We sneaked about like giddy adolescents," writes Frankel, "hoping to avoid discovery in crowded museums, distant parks, darkened theaters, and remote diners of the Bronx and Brooklyn." By the end of '88 they were married. For the first time since his Moscow assignment, Max Frankel was finding more happiness at home than at work.

Nonetheless, Frankel got a fair amount accomplished. Throughout his career, he had always prided himself on his strategic thinking about newspapering. He now set to work to find newer,

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better ways of engaging readers: improving layouts, lowering word counts and enlarging type size, emphasizing more enterprise stories and analytical pieces over duty stories that delivered "incremental crumbs" of information.

To the disgruntlement of his staff, he relied heavily upon readership surveys and focus groups to determine the habits and desires of readers. "My biggest secret on taking command of the *Times*," Frankel now confesses, "was that I often still had trouble reading it."

As worthy as most of these changes were, many on the staff saw them at best as tinkering and at worst as capitulations to the dumbing down of newspapers, à la *USA Today*. And for the reader of this memoir, they make for far less compelling reading than Frankel's picaresque wanderings through the corridors of power. The narrative drive that had held the first two-thirds of the memoir together begins to sputter. With Frankel now sitting behind the editor's desk, tinkering with layouts and organizational charts, the tumult of current events, so delightfully deafening throughout much of this book, becomes a muffled background noise. The Reagan Revolution, the Iran-Contra scandal, the gulf war, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the election of Bill Clinton all seem to slip by with barely a mention.

The real business at hand now becomes a crabbed accounting of managerial pluses and minuses: how many women have advanced to positions of authority; how many blacks are now at the paper, how many of them have positions of authority; what should we now call homosexuals in news stories? (Frankel's solution: "Gay and lesbian as adjectives in social, cultural, and political contexts, while continuing to use homosexual in reference to sexual, psychological, or clinical activity and orientation.")

Far from being applauded, his efforts at Perestroika simply emboldened the staff to complain ever more loudly. Here and there Frankel stumbled just enough to give them something real to complain about. He fills the back pages of his memoir with attempts to elucidate, apologize for, and defend these faux pas. Having grown fond of Frankel through the first several hundred pages, the reader now can only cringe at his various humiliations.

In 1990, a women's group had the temerity to count up the number of stories about women on the front pages of the *Times* and compare that performance with *USA Today*. The *Times* lost badly. So did Frankel by overreacting, first by protesting the comparison and then by telling Eleanor Randolph of *The Washington Post*: "... if you are covering local teas, you've got more women on page one than *The Wall Street Journal*." The following day every woman in the office showed up wearing tea bags as earrings — everyone except Joyce Purnick. Frankel then compounded the problem by dashing off a memo of explanation that began: "In my formative reportorial years, teas were a respected, predominantly female activity..."

This tea gaffe set the stage for a further protest, when the *Times* broke convention and published the name of the woman who had filed a rape charge against William Kennedy Smith. Nor was the decision to publish her name the whole of it. The article went on at length to describe the accuser, citing her "wild streak," her careless driving record, and her child out of wedlock. In the wake of the outcry, the *Times* then reversed itself and decided not to publish the woman's name in subsequent articles.

Frankel ruefully notes: "I found little comfort in the fact that I had created an atmosphere in which my *Times* colleagues felt so free to air dissent and grievance." By the end of his eight-year tenure in 1994, Frankel was ready to conclude: "The chief occupation of an editor in chief turned out to be fielding whines, whimpers, and laments."

At the age of 64, retirement must have seemed sweet indeed. Frankel was now free to write something other than memos — his bi-weekly column on the media for the *Times*, and this story of his life.

Midway through *The Times of My Life*, Frankel relates the soothing words Khrushchev told his beloved niece, Yulia, after he had been thrown out of power: "Don't cry. Of course, I've erred a lot. I'm going to be corrected and criticized. Who doesn't work, doesn't make mistakes. But you're never going to have to blush on my account."

Frankel could hardly say it better to his own three children. ■

FULL OR ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ENGLISH/BUSINESS JOURNALISM

The English Department of the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences of Baruch College seeks an Associate or Full Professor of Business Journalism to begin Sept 1, 1999.

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book reports

CITIZEN NEWHOUSE: PORTRAIT OF A MEDIA MERCHANT

BY CAROL FELSENTHAL. SEVEN STORIES PRESS. 512 PP. \$29.95.

The subject here is the junior Samuel I. Newhouse, known as Si, elder son and namesake of the S.I. Newhouse (1895-1979) who founded — or, rather, bought — an immense, privately held publishing empire. In the 1960s, Si Newhouse was awarded a sub-empire centering on the old Condé Nast magazines; later, he acquired, among other baubles, *The New Yorker*. The problem the biographer faced, beyond the non-cooperation of the subject and his family, was Si Newhouse's bloodless public persona. The biographer can hardly keep her attention on him. Instead, she offers a mind-numbing parade of Beautiful Magazines and Beautiful People. The primal scene, repeated again and again, is that of the magnate summoning a subordinate to his office and mumbling that he (or, more often, she) should clear out in favor of somebody younger, slimmer, more fey. Citizen Felsenthal did not lack industry. She read and interviewed whatever and whoever came to hand and tries to make depressing gossip sound titillating and important. No such luck.

JUST THE FACTS: HOW "OBJECTIVITY" CAME TO DEFINE AMERICAN JOURNALISM

BY DAVID T.Z. MINDICH. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS. 208 PP. \$24.95.

In this slimmed version of his dissertation, David Mindich seeks out the historical character of "objectivity," as American journalists accept or reject the term, and comes up with five earmarks: detachment, nonpartisanship, the inverted-pyramid style (the news lead), "naïve empiricism" or reliance on facts, and balance. That formulation is the least interesting part. Once past it, Mindich offers an engaging discussion of how each of these characteristics emerged in nineteenth-century journalism. For example, he suggests that a model for the inverted pyramid was created by the Civil War communiqués of a

non-journalist, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. He is no apologist for objectivity; he contrasts the anti-lynching journalism of Ida B. Wells at the turn of the last century with mainstream objectivity and finds the latter wanting. Throughout, Mindich shows a converse with current scholarship rare among journalism historians.

DINING OUT: SECRETS FROM AMERICA'S LEADING CRITICS, CHEFS, AND RESTAURATEURS

BY ANDREW DORNENBURG AND KAREN PAGE. JOHN WILEY & SONS. 343 PP. \$29.95.

Time was that restaurant reviews consisted of items copied from celebrity columns, mounted in fly-specked frames next to the entrance. This volume is evidence that today's restaurant critics have taken on new gravitas. William Rice of the *Chicago Tribune* remarks: "Restaurant reviewing seems to me, without question, the least understood, the least researched, and the most difficult of the critical arts." Not a few of those represented herein think of themselves not as mere eaters but as sociologists, chronicling the burgeoning role of food and restaurants in American culture. They scarcely acknowledge the subtext of this splashy paean to gastronomy — that critics are not mere journalists but adjuncts to the restaurant business. Their role, according to one restaurateur, is to "generate great enthusiasm for dining out." This is not a corrupt relationship in the traditional sense — the reviews can occasionally be utterly unflattering — but it is symbiotic. Chefs and restaurateurs win enhanced reputations; critics become celebrities; restaurants and newspapers prosper. Who can be the loser?

A CREED FOR MY PROFESSION: WALTER WILLIAMS, JOURNALIST TO THE WORLD

BY RONALD T. FARRAR. UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI PRESS. 246 PP. \$29.95.

This is a genial biography of the man who created America's first fledgling journalism school. Walter

Williams (1864-1935) was a product of back-country journalism who found his role in life when he came to Columbia, Missouri, site of the University of Missouri. As a local newspaperman he enhanced his reputation by working and speechifying in regional and national associations. Later, he became a member of the governing board at the university, helped promote the journalism school into existence, and in 1908 became its first dean. Although he lacked college education, he ultimately became the Depression-era president of the university and served almost until his death. Farrar, a member of the journalism faculty at the University of South Carolina, deals fairly and thoroughly with the founder, not neglecting such personal foibles as his bent for self-promotion, his use of university money to fund his worldwide travel, and his slightly premature courtship of his second wife.

AMBROSE BIERCE: A SOLE SURVIVOR, BITS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

EDITED BY S.T. JOSHI AND DAVID E. SCHULTZ. THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE PRESS. 356 PP. \$38.

Joshi and Schultz, free-lance editors, have scoured manuscript repositories and libraries across the country to create the autobiography that Ambrose Bierce neglected to write. Why Bierce? Because he is the best of the old breed of untamed journalists, contentious, aggressive, even reckless. He is remembered today primarily for his sardonic *Devil's Dictionary*, for the quatrain he wrote predicting the assassination of President McKinley (which, as Bierce explained, was meant as a warning, not a forecast), and for his disappearance, presumably into Mexico, in 1913, an episode imagined in the Carlos Fuentes novel, *The Old Gringo*. But there is much more here — vivid Civil War dispatches, newspaper wars in San Francisco, encounters with William Randolph Hearst. Some of this has been published or republished before; much has not. It is all impeccably presented and documented, and is a gem of its kind.

— James Boylan

Civic Journalism is ...

About rebuilding our credibility.

In 1960, I received the Pulitzer Prize for my coverage of the Milledgeville (Georgia) State Hospital. At the time, it was the nation's largest mental institution, with 12,500 patients and just 48 doctors. Conditions were deplorable. It was a snakepit, a warehouse for humans.

My Milledgeville reporting taught me an important journalism lesson: You should always follow up reports exposing bad conditions with additional reports on proposals to reform or correct the conditions. After the Atlanta Constitution published the Milledgeville series, an editor assigned me to go to Kansas and write a series about its outstanding mental health reform program. I wasn't enthusiastic but my editor was right. The Kansas series demonstrated that the newspaper cared as much about reform as it did about an expose. And it served as a blueprint for reforming Georgia's mental health program.

Too often today much of the news media seems obsessed with reporting problems – almost to the extent of ignoring or excluding solutions.

Civic journalism is an attempt to bring the average citizen into the process of journalism to solve social problems. It brings in people who would not normally be involved in governmental solutions and engages people who are normally left out of the process.

And that helps improve the credibility of newspapers, which is very important. The popularity of newspapers is the lowest it's been at any time in my career. Not that we're looking for popularity, but when you're as unpopular as we are, you need to look for what's wrong. I think part of what's wrong is that we look too much at problems and not enough at what to do about them. Civic journalism is a remedy.



Photo: Al Stephenson

Jack Nelson
Former Washington Bureau Chief
Los Angeles Times

The Pew Center for Civic Journalism is pleased to present this message, first in a series on how journalists are working to improve news coverage by involving citizens and to improve the community through their journalism. For more information, call 202-331-3200.



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The Hypocrisy Flag

by Mike Hoyt

We are in this taxicab, a bunch of high-church journalists, and somebody says he heard on the radio that Larry Flynt would that very night expose a bunch of philandering Republican congressmen at a press conference in L.A. We chuckle in our sophisticated fashion.

Meanwhile, I'm thinking, *Larry Flynt!* How will this get covered? In the morning, as I expect, National Public Radio airs nothing about it (though it would by evening), and my *New York Times* reliably finds the story unfit to print. I am reassured. Yet I switch the radio to Imus to learn more, and find out that just one congressman, the Clinton-hating Bob Barr, got skewered. Details are in short supply, since the I-man is fixated on Barr's moustache, which he thinks looks like Hitler's.

On the way to work I grab the tabs. The weasel-ish *New York Post* slips a vague mention of Barr into a story about Clinton headlined GOP: BILL STAINS AMERICAN HONOR. Thank God for the *Daily News*. Here I fully learn what Flynt has alleged: that Barr invoked Georgia's equivalent of the Fifth Amendment thirteen years ago to avoid answering questions from his second wife, Gail, about his relationship with the woman who would become his third. And that Barr, fiercely anti-abortion in public, signed a check for that procedure and, according to Gail's affidavit, drove her to the clinic. There is nothing quite as satisfying as the sight of a hypocrite speared. I guess. So how come I feel queasy?

All these years after Gary Hart, we journalists still aren't sure how we feel about passing along stories about the private lives of public people. Oh, the Barr story got out, all right. Some 200 reporters were at the press conference. Even C-SPAN had planned to cover it but chickened out. *C-SPAN!* Dee Dee Myers and *The Washington Post's* Howard Kurtz appeared later on *Larry King Live*, in a roundtable discussion about whether the press should discuss these kinds of things.

As I remember it, the Hart tempest had a refrain that is familiar these days — that the story wasn't really about sex. It was, we said, about Hart's recklessness. Or maybe it was about lying, since Hart had denied he fooled around. I can't remember. I just remember the picture of Donna Rice on Hart's lap on the good ship *Monkey Business*. Now, in the backwash of Monicagate, we have a new spasm of stories that are not about sex. They are, we hear, about hypocrisy.

- In September, Congressman Dan Burton of Indiana, famous Clinton-hater, admits to the *Indianapolis Star* that he fathered a child out of wedlock. He is prompted by an article that was supposed to appear in *Vanity Fair* but never did.

- Helen Chenoweth, running for reelection to the House

on family values themes, is outed in *The Idaho Statesman* that same month for a past affair with a married legislator.

- Days later *Salon* famously details Henry Hyde's lengthy adulterous affair thirty years ago with a married woman.

- Crusader Flynt, who pays big bucks for evidence of congressional adultery, gets some on House-Speaker-to-be Bob Livingston. Livingston quits. Humanitarian Flynt decides not to run the story in *Hustler*.

- Then Barr. Press coverage focuses more on the alleged sexual affair — surprise! — than on the alleged acquiescence to abortion, an option Barr would deny to others. Flynt says eight more exposés are in the works.

These cases are all different. In an odd way, *Hustler* aside, they seem journalistically bracketed by two pieces in *Salon*. After the Hyde piece ran, editor David Talbot justified it this way in a *Salon* editorial: "Aren't we fighting fire with fire, descending to the gutter tactics of those we deplore? Frankly, yes. But ugly times call for ugly tactics." The thinking reminds me of an old girlfriend who once justified throwing litter out the car window with the notion that it would more quickly bring on the revolution.

Salon also ran the Dan Burton story, a longer version of the Russ Baker article that was supposed to have run in *Vanity Fair*. Published three days before Christmas, it didn't get much attention, and that may be unfortunate. The piece goes beyond the lovechild headline to paint a portrait of a complicated and troubled man. Baker documents enough skirt-chasing by Burton to make Bill Clinton tired, and raises questions about sexual harassment, campaign-fund irregularities, and whether Burton put girlfriends on his paid staff. If anyone invites examination under the flag of hypocrisy it might be someone who called the president "a scumbag."

Still, when we march under that flag we need to consider where it is we are heading, and whether we can stop.

Here comes another election season. The ever-eager Dan Quayle has already announced he is adultery-free, as if that gave us a bearing on his qualifications, or even his morality. Do you want to be the one to check it out? Maybe by the time you read this the GOP "big fish" that Flynt said he would land is already up on shore, gasping for the air of privacy. Are you sure you want to deny it to him? Maybe Pat Robertson will come forward with a sinners list of his own. Then what?

Let's just stop. We've had our fun. It's time for a shower. Bill Clinton has been described lately as deeply divided. There is "Saturday Night" Bill and "Sunday Morning" Bill. The media are similarly split. When the revelations of Saturday Night Larry Flynt nearly get covered by Sunday Morning C-SPAN, what time is it? Nearly midnight. ♦

Mike Hoyt (mh151@columbia.edu) is CJR's senior editor.



JOURNALISTIC IMPACT

Single: **Dirck Halstead**, *Time*
Essay: **Zed Nelson**, *Time*



NATURE & ENVIRONMENT

Single: **Frederick Charles**, *LIFE*
Essay: **Peter Brown**, *DoubleTake*



SPORTS

Single: **Ross Kinnaid**, *Sports Illustrated*
Essay: **Various**, *Rolling Stone*



THE WAY WE LIVE

Single: **Sebastião Salgado**, *Rolling Stone*
Essay: **Tim Rice**, *Philadelphia*



ARCHITECTURE

Single: **Richard Barnes**, *Nest*
Essay: **Robert Polidori**, *The New Yorker*



NEWS

Single: **Paul Lowe**, *Time*
Essay: **Paul Lowe**, *Time*



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Single: **Catrina Genovese**, *LIFE*
Essay: **Max Aguilera-Hellweg**, *LIFE*



PORTRAIT

Single: **Mark Seliger**, *Rolling Stone*
Essay: **David Seidner**, *Vanity Fair*



FASHION

Single: **Deborah Turbeville**, *W*
Essay: **Deborah Turbeville**, *W*



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

Seb Janiak, *Details*



STILL LIFE

Raymond Meier, *Harper's Bazaar*



COVER OF THE YEAR

Dirck Halstead, *Time*

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HEARST: WHERE JOURNALISM OF DISTINCTION IS AN EVERYDAY STORY

READERS REDISCOVERED THE HUDSON RIVER WHEN A TEAM FROM THE ALBANY TIMES UNION TURNED THEIR 18-DAY JOURNEY INTO JOURNALISM.



PHOTO: PAUL BUCKOWSKI



From its origin as a trickle at Lake Tear of the Clouds in the Adirondack Mountains, the Hudson River flows 315 miles south to its mouth in New York Harbor. Halfway down, it passes Albany, home of the Albany Times Union.

Three Times Union staff members hiked, canoed, rafted, sailed and motored their way down the Hudson, exploring the river's condition and its effect on the communities that grew up alongside it. While columnist Fred LeBrun, features editor Michael Virtanen and photographer Paul Buckowski reported their adventures from the river, a team of journalists in Albany examined related issues in special reports. Project editor Teresa Buckley traveled between the home front and the river front to coordinate the series, which incorporated print, audio and the internet.

As the journey down the Hudson progressed, so did the response. Letters, phone calls and reprint requests flowed in from people of all ages. Impromptu welcoming parties greeted the journalists on the river banks. The series gave people up and down the river a fresh perspective on something many had taken for granted, as the spirit of discovery spread from journalists to communities. "The Hudson River Chronicles" is another example of how Hearst Newspapers enrich readers' lives every day.

Read "Hudson River Chronicles" on the Web at www.timesunion.com

The Lower case

Detroit to parade models of new cars

Lamb Retiring From USU Animal Department

The Salt Lake Tribune 12/13/98



Elkhart (Ind.) Truth 12/28/98

Experts suggest education standards might be to lofty

The Courier-News (N.J.) 1/25/99

Steamed pudding and crap dip

The Sacramento Bee 12/27/98

Russian snowmobile rider crushed under his vehicle

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOSCOW, Maine — A Moscow man was killed when his 400-pound snowmobile rolled on top of him on an embankment less than 100 yards from his home, authorities said.

Telegram and Gazette (Worcester, Mass.) 1/16/99

Mob torches police station, shops in Indonesia

CNN Interactive 1/03/99

Bronx Girl, 3, Dies In Fire Tied to Heater

The Denver Post 1/7/99

The trucker has no blood or alcohol in his system, but he's been driving for more than 10 hours.

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette 1/04/99

Spy charges dog inspectors

The Clinton Chronicle (S.C.) 9/30/98

Sobriety of magistrate wins attention of chief judge

The Des Moines Register (Iowa) 1/08/99

Please release sketch of suspect in assault

Post Crescent (Appleton, Wis.) 11/05/98

Mercantile Bank cuts spare Iowa workers

The Des Moines Register 1/22/99

Dyson Team has solid year; four people die at area tracks

Poughkeepsie Journal 12/25/98

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